

# LET ONE HUNDRED FLOWERPOTS BLOOM



NEW YORK YEAR ZERO

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- and Movements,” in *The Dynamics of Social Movement*, eds. Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1979); Gadi Wolfsfeld, “Media, Protest, and Political Violence: A Transactional Analysis,” *Journalism Monographs* 127 (1991). It is also noteworthy that the Black Blocs and their allies have actually garnered some support, even among certain members of the middle class. See Alexander Cockburn, Jeffery St. Clair, and Alan Sekula, *5 Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond* (London: Verso, 2000), 69.
90. Some feminist militants accuse the Black Blocs of discouraging women from joining. However, certain Black Blocs include affinity groups comprised only of women.
91. What I know of the Black Bloc phenomenon suggests that there is little chance of it leading to terrorism: “If this movement progresses in terms of escalating violence alone then we will lose, because they have guns and we do not.” Sullivan, “We are heartbroken and furious!” 39.
92. As was the case at the demonstrations in Ottawa against the IMF and the World Bank in the fall of 2001.
93. Daniel Dylan Young, “Autonomia and the Origin of Black Bloc” (10 June 2001), <http://www.ainfos.ca/01/jun/ainfos00170.html> (accessed May 2010).
94. The same process of appraisal was behind the decision of European squatters to move on to more aggressive methods, as explained in Anders Corr’s “Movement Use of Violence,” *No Trespassing: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), ch. 5.
95. I base this assertion on Carter, “Anarchism and Violence.”
96. Interviewee BB2 elaborated further on this point: “[T]rue violence resides in state and capitalist oppression, and this oppression is always visible. Every day, we go by a McDo, reminding us that exploitation exists. Some people are constantly harassed by the police. At those times the power relationship is not in our favour. These situations of oppression and exploitation engender feelings of frustration, so we look for an outlet, which trashing provides us with.” See also the Black Bloc media releases “Pourquoi nous étions à Gênes,” in Dupuis-Déri, *Les Black Blocs*, 181; and ACME Collective, “N30 Black Bloc Communiqué about Seattle US” (1999), [www.ainfos.ca](http://www.ainfos.ca).

80. George's terms are similar to those used in a Swiss police report expressing dismay over "a destructive, apparently groundless, madness" and "acts of vandalism devoid of political or ideological motivations." Office fédéral de la police, Département fédéral de Justice et Police, Service d'analyse et de prévention, *Le potentiel de violence résidant dans le mouvement antimondialisation*, Berne, July 2001. Thanks to O. Fillieule for this reference.
81. Dupuis-Déri, "Broyer du noir."
82. Moises Noim, "Lori's War," *Foreign Policy*, Spring (2000): 28. For another example of a reformist leader's dream of seeing the police arrest anarchists, see Timothy Egan, "Talks and Turmoil: The Violence," *New York Times*, 2 December 1999, Sec. A.
83. George, *Un autre monde est possible si...*, 267, emphasis added.
84. To quote a statement by members of a Black Bloc, "We don't want to take part in discussions among the masters of the world; we want there to be no more masters of the world." Press release quoted in Francis Dupuis-Déri, *Les Black Blocs: Quand la liberté et l'égalité se manifestent* (Montréal: Lux, 2003), 178.
85. Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971), 20.
86. Martin Breugh, *L'Expérience plébéienne: Une histoire discontinuée de la liberté politique* (Paris: Payot, 2007), 211.
87. Founder and leader of the Trotskyist party, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (France).
88. In Seattle, the police violence began several hours before the Black Blocs entered the fray and was directed against demonstrators practicing nonviolent civil disobedience.
89. The relationship between social movements and the media has been the subject of a number of studies in the social sciences suggesting that demonstrators who resort to violence attract greater media attention in comparison with nonviolent demonstrators; however, there is no consensus about the qualitative effects of the use of force. See Richard Cluttbuck, *The Media and Political Violence*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan Press 1983); P. Hocke, "Determining the Selection Bias in Local and National Newspaper Reports on Protests Events," in *Acts of Dissent*, eds. D. Rucht, R. Koopmans, and F. Neidhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); S. Hug and D. Wisler, "Correcting for the Selection Bias in Social Movement Research," *Mobilization* 3, 2 (1998): 141–61; Harvey Molotch, "Media

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65. Sullivan, "We are heartbroken and furious!," 34.
66. Marcos Ancelovici, "Organizing against Globalization: The Case of ATTAC in France," *Politics & Society* 30, 3 (2002): 427–63.
67. Susan George and Martin Wolf, *La Mondialisation libérale* (Paris: Bernard Grasset-Les Échos, 2002), 166.
68. Susan George, *Un autre monde est possible si...,* 255.
69. George, *Un autre monde est possible si...,* 255.
70. T. Muller, *What's Really Under Those Cobblestones? Ritos as Political Tools, and the Case of Gothenburg 2001* (unpublished manuscript), in Sullivan, "We are heartbroken and furious!," 36.
71. Christian Losson and Paul Quinio, *Génération Seattle: Les rebelles de la mondialisation* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), 156, emphasis added.
72. For a recent overview of the partial state of this knowledge, see Marco Giugni, "Was It Worth the Effort? The Outcomes and Consequences of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 371–93; Steven E. Barkan and Lynne L. Snowden, *Collective Violence* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001).
73. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "Normalizing Collective Protest," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1992), 301–24. For some conclusions resulting from this sort of analytical and political outlook, see the section "Un impact politique limité" in Pleyers, "Des black blocks aux alter-activistes," 130.
74. Christian Spillmann, "Gênes: Violences, discorde, les dirigeants du G8 n'ont pas de quoi pavoiser," *Agence France Presse*, 22 July 2001.
75. Éric Budry, "Choc et stratégie—Les altermondialistes refusent le piège des groupuscules violents," *Tribune de Genève*, 2 June 2003, emphasis added.
76. Christophe Aguiton, *Gênes 19-20-21 juillet 2001: Multitudes en marche contre l'Empire* (Paris: Éditions Reflex, 2002), 265, emphasis added.
77. Emphasis added.
78. George, *Un autre monde est possible si...,* 270, emphasis added.
79. George, *Un autre monde est possible si...,* 262.

54. WOMBLES, G8 *Black Bloc*.
55. Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*.
56. For an account of the events, see Cindy Milsten, "Something Did Start in Quebec City: North America's Revolutionary Anticapitalist Movement," in *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches From a Global Movement*, eds. Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose, and George Katsiaficas (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004), 126–33; David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh, Oakland: AK Press, 2009). In the wake of the CLAC-CASA rallies against the Summit of the Americas, a number of anticapitalist convergences (ACC) appeared in New York, Washington, Chicago, Seattle, Calgary, and elsewhere, adopting the principles of the CLAC (posted on its website)—including "respect for tactical diversity." The CASA disbanded in August 2001.
57. Sale is the French word for "dirty;" hence SalAMI means "dirty friend." With regard to Prague (2000), see Graeme Chesters & Ian Welsh, "Rebel Colours: 'Framing' in Global Social Movement," *Sociological Review*, 52, 3 (2004): 314–335.
58. Alternative libertaire, Confédération nationale du travail, Fédération anarchiste, Federazione anarchisti italiani, Organisation communiste libertaire, Organisation socialiste libertaire, Red libertaria, Réseau No Passaran, among others.
59. WOMBLES is an acronym for White Overall Movement Building Liberation through Effective Struggle.
60. Rhythms of Resistance, <http://www.rhythmsofresistance.co.uk> (accessed May 2010).
61. Kate Evans, "It's Got to be Silver and Pink: On the Road with Tactical Frivolity," in *We are Everywhere*, ed. Notes from nowhere (London, New York: Verso, 2003), 293; Amory Starr, *Global Revolt: A Guide to the Movements Against Globalization* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2005), 241; George McKay, *DIY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain* (London: Verso, 1998), 15.
62. Evans, "It's Got to be Silver and Pink," 293.
63. See "Lausanne: Des blacks & pinks témoignent et revendiquent," at [www.paris.indymedia.org](http://www.paris.indymedia.org).
64. Colonel Klepto and Major up Evil, "The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army Goes to Scotland via a Few Other Places," in *Shut Them Down!: The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements* (Leeds, Brooklyn: Dissent!/Automedia, 2005).

## Violence and Responsibility

Since the environment today, which obliges the masses to live in misery, is maintained by violence, we advocate and prepare for violence.

—Errico Malatesta

There is no such thing as non-violence.

—Étienne Balibar

If one gives a little thought to the theme of violence, the first thing one notices is a proliferation of ambiguities, paradoxes, and uncertainties. Yet what's even more striking is the number of people who believe the theme can be treated dogmatically, dragging in moral absolutes, religious nostrums, ahistorical appeals to the authority of great gurus, etc. For them, the issue is already decided, and with these people, no true debate is possible. The best thing would be to let them go along on their way, their consciences obviously at peace. One's attitude towards violence often seems to have much to do with personal temperament, anyway. But these individuals rarely are content to have "solved" the "problem" of violence in their own minds; they insist on inserting themselves into popular struggles and imposing their point of view, struggles that by their very nature often contain a disruptive, confrontational, and—why not?—violent aspect. And so it seems necessary, again and again, to treat the question of violence in social struggles, although it may ultimately be something of an abstract exercise. Denouncing or encouraging "violence" does little to change the underlying character of these struggles, which in certain conditions can erupt like a force of nature. But for those of us with the luxury, or inclination, to reflect on such questions, there can be value in clarifying and finding our bearings in a system whose core is in fact murderous brutality—brutality that touches any number of victims in their everyday lives.

There are those who have made it their mission to oppose all systemic violence. Without seeking personal fame or status, they fight for a world based on free agreement and association, mutual aid and solidarity. They oppose all hierarchies and forms of oppression, and so seek to eliminate coercive violence in human relations (and in our



relations with nature), as far as this is possible. It may be safe to say that an intimate abhorrence for violence is what motivates many to contest the dominant order. Here enter the ambiguities, however: to oppose, to eliminate something is its own kind of violence. Revolutionaries wish to destroy the violent systems of domination not with words only, or because they read some book, or because they are interested in selling their ideas or making careers—but because they feel this domination in their inmost core. This means that the impulse to erase violent coercion is taken seriously, and invested with real energy and vigor—sometimes, and from a certain perspective, it may even take on the appearance of “violence.” When one is under attack, is there any blame in defending oneself?

Empire is undergoing a profound crisis, as we know. An economic crisis, certainly, but also a much more far-reaching crisis of legitimacy. Radicals and rebels, as well as “self-described anarchists,” have never accepted the legitimacy of this system. Now, emerging from the global resistances, riots, and (incomplete) revolutions of 2011, we are faced with an obviously unique opportunity to degrade the established order as much as possible, while pushing events towards something new and liberatory. This may very well be the last moment in our lives when capitalism can be steered onto the road towards defeat. It is sheer foolishness to think that now, of all times, we are going to contain our anger, be polite, and let the more comfortable tell us how to resist. Our movements are going to be as loud, lively, and raucous as we can make them—and as dangerous for the powers that be.

Yes, there will be mistakes, excesses, outbursts that perhaps do more strategic harm than good, but these we will calmly absorb, without forgetting who our comrades are or why they act as they do. “I prefer spontaneous mistakes to truth imposed.” The way to deal with these will not be with self-righteous moralizing, denunciations, cheap law-and-order rhetoric, the parading of sanctimonious pacifism, and the blind worship of so-called universal principles (which, as we’ve seen, are not in fact applied universally). The important thing is to never lose sight of the true enemy and the real vehicles of violence in today’s world: the privileged classes, the institutions of the state and private property, the norms that impose gender and racial domination, etc. In any case, given the intensity of the assault on the ordinary, the oppressed and the disenfranchised that is underway at the present time, the level of response hardly provokes concern for its “excessiveness.” Quite the contrary, the remarkable thing is the timidity, hesitation and overall weakness that can be observed in many terrains of struggle. Resistance will have to become much more massive, relentless and

ecological action in the forest. Yet the hero is a dogmatically nonviolent activist. In one scene we see him arguing with an arrogant Black Blocker.

41. On the other hand, the nonviolent option, often perceived as more “rational” and morally superior, can also be traced back to emotions such as a fear of turmoil or of the police, an aesthetic preference for order, a psychological inclination toward obedience (to the police, the law, and such), a wish to conform with nonviolent models, and so forth.
42. See also Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute.”
43. The same conclusion was reached by activists in France; Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute,” 93.
44. Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 174.
45. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978 [1923]), 279; Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
46. In Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute,” 53.
47. Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute,” 29.
48. Ickibob, “On the Black Bloc,” 39–40.
49. For a detailed discussion of affinity groups and anarchism, see Francis Dupuis-Déri, “Anarchism and the Politics of Affinity Groups,” *Anarchist Studies* 18, 1 (2010): 40–61.
50. Dupuis-Déri, “Anarchism and the politics of affinity groups.”
51. John Clark, “The Microecology of Community,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 15, 4 (2004): 69–79.
52. The impossibility of preventing the emergence of informal power is no doubt the most widespread criticism levelled against anarchism. But anarchists and other anti-authoritarian groups—including radical feminists from 1970 onward—have given the issue careful consideration and proposed various solutions. See, for instance, Per Herngren, *Path of Resistance: The Practice of Civil Disobedience* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993), 149–92.
53. In Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute,” 103, 105.

29. George Katsiaficas uses the expression “emotional rationality;” see “The Eros Effect,” paper presented at the 1989 American Sociological Association National Meetings in San Francisco, <https://www.eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.PDF> (accessed May 2010). See also James Jasper, “L’art de la protestation collective,” in *Les formes de l’action collective*, ed. Daniel Cefaï (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 2001), 135–59; Philippe Braud, *L’émotion en politique* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1996).
30. George E. Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen Emotion in Democratic Politics* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002).
31. Voltairine de Cleyre, *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Anarchist, Feminist, Genius*, eds. S. Presley and C. Sartwell (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 54.
32. All interviews are anonymous, but information about the interviewees can be found in “Information about the Interviewees.”
33. Clément Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute: Le cas de la violence exercée lors des contre-sommets” (master thesis, Université Paris I—Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2002), 80.
34. With regard to contemporary anarchists’ view on “revolution,” see Andy Chan, “Anarchists, Violence and Social Change: Perspectives from Today’s Grassroots,” *Anarchist Studies* 12, 1 (1995): 11–28; Francis Dupuis-Déri, “En deuil de revolutions?” *Réfractio* 13 (2004).
35. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 174.
36. Herbert Marcuse, *La fin de l’utopie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968); Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1970); Mario Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l’Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001).
37. Barette, “La pratique de la violence politique par l’émeute,” 97.
38. Roger Dupuy, *La politique du peuple: Racines, permanences et ambiguïtés du populisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002); Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
39. WOMBLES, *G8 Black Bloc*.
40. Thanks to David Graeber for this historical analysis. It is worth noting here that the film *Battle in Seattle* (2008) glosses over part of the history of radical activism in the United States by presenting a protagonist who saw his brother killed by the police during a nonviolent

determined before any worries about passing the limits of simple humaneness can arise.

In other words, we are not presented with a choice, one between clean hands and a pure soul, on the one hand, and violence on the other. What we face is a situation not of our own choosing—violence surrounds us, forms us, and makes us who we are. The social war is a reality, and to pretend to evade it is an illusion. Whether it is robot missiles pounding villages and exploding bodies in Pakistan; the mass rapes and the million or more corpses piled up in Iraq; the oil spills and nuclear meltdowns that poison the planet and extinguish life; the everyday cruelty that terrorizes queers, so-called “immigrants” (as though this state-invented category meant anything), and all the “outsiders” and “others;” the borders, prisons and police that isolate, separate, torture and destroy lives; men abusing their partners; the mass media assaulting minds and distorting sexuality; the deadening of the spirit and arbitrary regimentation experienced by young people trapped in schools; the selling of entire lives in the form of work for the profit of bosses, investors and corporations; the homelessness that creates whole populations treated as the superfluous of our society—these and so many more instances of the violence necessarily generated by this system, constitutive of this system that everyone perforce participates in to some degree, demonstrate that violence is inescapable, and not some mere option or tactic to be decided on in an intellectual discussion.

When one acknowledges that one is necessarily entangled in a violent situation, then the real questions of responsibility and judgement begin. Is it violent to wear a mask at a political demonstration, to break a bank window, or to demonize those who do, contributing to the totalitarian police atmosphere that surrounds us—an atmosphere that leads to people being spied on, persecuted, and imprisoned? Does the violence lie in defending space wrested from the oppressors, in writing graffiti—or in publishing articles, cashing in on a movement, or perhaps simply leading a narrow middle-class life while the government murders and spreads suffering to millions? “Politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same,” Hannah Arendt once remarked. To refrain from rebelling—actually rebelling, not just making a show of rebelling for cultural capital—is to support the status quo. We are adults and there is no evading the problems that face us, least of all by hiding behind pacifist rhetoric. The “non-violence” that does not make every possible effort to end the violence perpetrated daily by the powers that be, that instead attacks the rebels and the recalcitrants and becomes just another cop, is per-

haps the worst, the most hypocritical and disgusting violence of all. “Non-violence” as a universal principle merely translates into violence in favor of the current system. The outrage directed at someone who vandalizes a symbol of capital shows that the outrage directed at “violence” was never genuine to begin with.

The individuals and institutions that rule this world have plunged us into extreme violence, and made a counter-violence unavoidable. Of course this does not mean that our violence is simply the mirror-image of theirs, or that rebellion is a dumb reflex or reaction to external forces. Nor is it a matter only of waiting until some manifest incident of horror moves us to act. Initiative and affirmation are as much a part of the project. Not to mention the spirit, motivations and vision that inform revolt are utterly alien to the will to power that crushes us in its grip.

Anarchists have no interest in a universal morality, in abstract ideals and daydreams. They do, however, maintain a certain ethics and sustain a certain responsibility. It is not enough to speak of disobedience, resistance and revolution without seeking out the practices that give these things reality. When someone like Chris Hedges, without the least interest in accuracy, lies about anarchists and helps build the “War on Terror”-style discourse that allows the state to target radicals and attempt to destroy lives—as it is doing with the Cleveland 4 prisoners (set up and arrested by the Feds on May Day), the arrestees at the recent NATO summit, the victims of the federal grand jury investigation in the Pacific Northwest—it is hard to see why anarchists shouldn’t put their principles into action and defend themselves against Chris Hedges by whatever means seem appropriate.

Hedges and his ilk claim to believe that passively allowing ourselves to be beaten, locked up, assaulted with chemical weapons, etc. will mean victory in the end. How this is so, remains very murky even to the least critical mind. All experience, historical and otherwise, rather points to the conclusion that the privileged will never suddenly feel pangs of guilt, stop their attacks and abandon their privileges. Privileges, monopolies and oppressive institutions are torn down by force. The very act of creating something new entails the “violence” of change.

If Hedges believes suffering and martyrdom are the paths to overthrowing Wall Street and the rest of the system, he is of course welcome to try. We expect to see him on the front lines of the next street demonstration, offering his head to be bashed in by a cop’s baton

Diffusion of Movement Ideas,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 528 (1993): 56–74.

17. Ickibob, “On the Black Bloc,” in *A New World in Our Hearts: Eight Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation*, ed. R. San Filippo (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 39–40. Originally published in *Love & Rage* (July-August 1992).
18. Having acted as analyst and commentator for the public television network Radio-Canada at a number of alter-globalization demonstrations, I can personally attest to the mainstream media’s fascination with the Black Blocs. During planning sessions, producers, researchers, and reporters asked me to predict where the “trashing” (*la casse*) would happen, so they could place their cameras in readiness at strategic spots. When no “trashing” occurred, the demonstration would be described by the team as a media “non-event.”
19. Lynn Owens and L. Kendall Palmer, “Making the News: Anarchist Counter-Public Relations on the World Wide Web,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, 4 (2003): 335–61.
20. Alan O’Connor, “Punk Subculture in Mexico and the Anti-Globalization Movement: A Report from the Front,” *New Political Science* 25, 1 (2003): 43–53.
21. Geoffrey Pleyers, “Des black blocks aux alter-activistes,” 125–26.
22. Sian Sullivan, “‘We are heartbroken and furious!’: Engaging with Violence and the (Anti) Globalisation Movement(s),” *CSGR Working Paper* 123/03 (2003): 16, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/research/workingpapers/2004/wp13304.pdf> (accessed May 2010).
23. Sullivan, “‘We are heartbroken and furious!’” 24–26.
24. Sullivan, “‘We are heartbroken and furious!’” 30; Francis Dupuis-Déri, “Broyer du noir: Manifestations et répression policière au Québec,” *Les ateliers de l’éthique* 1, 1 (2006).
25. Sullivan, “‘We are heartbroken and furious!’” 26.
26. In Sullivan, “‘We are heartbroken and furious!’” 30.
27. WOMBLES, *G8 Black Bloc: Report from an activist in Lausanne*, 6 June 2003, <http://www.wombles.org.uk/article200610209.php> (accessed May 2010).
28. Two companer@s from the Calisse Brigade, “A. Anti. Anti-Capitalista!” June 10, 2007, <http://hatetheg8.blogspot.com/>.



*Communist Anarchism?* (New York: Dover Publications 1972), 173–81; April Carter, “Anarchism and Violence,” *Nomos: Anarchism* 19 (1978): 324–25; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 625–38. For a fascinating historical incident concerning a debate within a nonviolent anti-authoritarian social movement on the use of a pair of cutters to open the fence around a nuclear reactor, see Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 58–91.

10. Against elected officials of the French National Front (Montréal, September 1993), the Summit of the Americas in Québec City (April 2001), the IMF and the WB (Ottawa, November 2001), the World Economic Forum (New York, January 2002), the G8 (Calgary, July 2002), the G8 in Annemasse (June 2003), the WTO (Montréal, July 2003), and the G20 in Toronto (June 2010).
11. Primarily of the Convergence de luttes anti-capitalistes (CLAC), Montréal, in 2001–2002, and the Paris committee of the Village alternatif anti-capitaliste et anti-guerre (VAAAG), Paris, in March–June 2003.
12. Sina Rahmani, “Macht kaputt was euch kaputt macht: On the history and the meaning of the Black Block,” *Politics and Culture* 4 (November 9, 2009), <http://www.politicsandculture.org/2009/11/09/macht-kaputt-was-euch-kaputt-macht-on-the-history-and-the-meaning-of-the-black-block/> (accessed May 2010).
13. Rahmani, “Macht kaputt was euch kaputt macht.”
14. George Katsiaficas, “The Necessity of Autonomy,” *New Political Science* 23, 4 (2001): 547–53.
15. This overview of the origins of the Black Bloc is largely based on George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1997); on visual documents in A. G. Grauwasche, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus Den Ersten 23 Jahren* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2003); and on an interview conducted in Montréal on 26 November 2003 by the author with a 42-year-old man from Amsterdam who in the 1980s had participated in Black Blocs connected with the squat movements in Germany and the Netherlands.
16. Charles Tilly, “Les origines du répertoire d’action collective contemporaine en France et en Grande-Bretagne,” *Vingtième siècle* 4 (1984): 89–108; Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, “The Cross-National

and declaring that “victory.” Last year’s uprisings in North Africa and West Asia—complex, heterogeneous, and unfinished, but in Tunisia and Egypt at least, self-organized, leaderless upsurges that overthrew dictators—these uprisings that supposedly inspired the Occupy movement certainly did not proceed only by non-violent civil disobedience. In Egypt, police stations were burned to the ground, occupied spaces were defended with rocks, and agents of the regime—the torturers, snitches, and bullies that similarly keep things in place here in the US—were given the physical treatment they richly deserved.

AFFECT

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## Notes

Professor of Political Science at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). This text is an updated and edited version of an article published in French under the title “Penser l’action directe des Black Blocs” in the journal *Politix* in 2004. The first version was written while the author was an associate researcher at the Department of Political Science of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The author would like to thank John Clark and Olivier Fil- lieule for their comments, Lazer Lederhendler for the English trans- lation, and the FQRSC for its funding. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are ours.

1. Dave Morland, “Anti-Capitalism and Poststructuralist Anarchism,” in *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age*, eds. J. Purkis and J. Bowen, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 32–34.
2. Jérôme Montes, “Mouvements anti-mondialisation: La crise de la démocratie représentative,” *Études internationales*, 33, 4 (2001); Tim Dunne, “Anarchistes et Al-Qaeda,” *La Presse* (Montréal), 8 July, 2005.
3. NEFAC, <http://www.nefac.net/node/123>.
4. CrimethInc., “Black Bloc: a Primer,” *Profane Existence*, 43, 10, 2003.
5. Quoted by the Wu Ming Collective, *Stop The Encirclement of the Black Bloc* (2002), <http://www.cut-up.com/news/detail.php?sid=187>.
6. David Graeber, *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (Edinburgh, Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 390.
7. “Anthology to the Present, Vancouver, British Columbia,” <http://berthoalain.wordpress.com/2010/02/14/emeute-a-vancouver-fevrier-2010/> (accessed May 2010).
8. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, “Social Movements and Organizational Form,” in *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), ch. 6; Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting* (New York: Columbia University Press 2003); Geoffrey Pleyers, “Des black blocs aux alter-activistes: Pôles et formes d’engagement des jeunes altermondialistes,” *Lien social et politiques* 51 (2004): 127; Tim Jordan, *Activism: Direct Action, Hacktivism and the Future of Society* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).
9. Many texts have been published on the subject of anarchism and violence. Among the most pertinent are Alexander Berkman, *What is*

## Information on the Interviewees

- AD1: Male, age 27. Took part in direct actions against the G8 Summit (Genoa), the European Summit (Brussels), and with Kurds against the arrest of Ochalla (Rome). Erected barricades, controlled streets, tagged, launched strikes against buildings (luxury hotel, temporary employment agency, supermarket). Interview conducted in Strasbourg, 23 June 2003.
- BB1: Male, early 20s. Participated in Black Blocs against the G20 (Montreal, November 2000) and the Summit of the Americas (Quebec City, April 2001). Interview conducted in Montreal, September 2000.
- BB2: Male, age 20. Took part in numerous affinity groups within Black Blocs against the G20 (in Montreal, November 2000) and the Summit of the Americas (Quebec City, April 2001). Was also at the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre, 2003). Interview conducted in Montreal, October 2002.
- BB3: Female, age 23. Participated in three Black Blocs: Rally against the G20 (Montreal, November 2000), demonstration held by the Collectif opposé à la brutalité policière (Montreal, 15 March 2001), demonstrations against the Summit of the Americas (Quebec City, April 2001). Interview conducted in Montreal, December 2002.
- F7: Female, age 23. Activist in student organizations and in SalAMI, and later in anarchist and/or feminist groups: the CLAC, les Sorcières, Rebelles sans frontières. Interview conducted in Montreal, 25 April 2004.
- GA7: Female, age 24. Boston resident. Took part in her first affinity group in 2001 during the occupation of Harvard administration offices to demand better working conditions for the superintendents. Participated in other groups during rallies against the World Economic Forum (New York, Winter 2002), against the war in Iraq (Boston, 2003), and against the G8 in France (June, 2003). Interview conducted in Paris, June 2003.
- V10: Male, age 24. Carried out direct actions—destruction of property, looting—in Nice (December 2000), Genoa (July 2001), Annemasse (June 2003), and took part in the VAAAG. Interview conducted in Paris, 11 December 2003.

## APPENDIX

native media offices were located, and proceeded to make a number of violent arrests. This sort of incident led me to conclude somewhat hastily in an earlier version of this article (published in France in 2004) that the Black Bloc tactic was probably outdated. But since then, Black Blocs intervened effectively in rallies against the G8 in Scotland in 2005, against the G8 in Germany in 2007, and against NATO in Strasbourg in 2009, and against the G20 in Toronto in 2010.

In an article on the Black Bloc tactic, Daniel Dylan Young writes:

Whether the Black Bloc continues as a tactic or is abandoned, it certainly has served its purpose. In certain places and times the Black Bloc effectively empowered people to take action in collective solidarity against the violence of state and capitalism. It is important that we neither cling to it nostalgically as an outdated ritual or tradition, nor reject it wholesale because it sometimes seems inappropriate. Rather we should continue working pragmatically to fulfill our individual needs and desires through various tactics and objectives, as they are appropriate at the specific moment. Masking up in Black Bloc has its time and place, as do other tactics which conflict with it.<sup>93</sup>

As already explained, the use of force by the Black Bloc belongs to the anarchist tradition, but for many participants, it also results from an assessment of the tactical and strategic context and a political appraisal of personal experiences with nonviolent actions, which they later come to see as insufficient or, worse, ineffective.<sup>94</sup> In any case, those who take part in Black Blocs view the force that they occasionally deploy as qualitatively superior, in political and moral terms,<sup>95</sup> to the violence of their enemies: first, because it is far less destructive (contrary to state or capitalist violence, Black Bloc violence has never been lethal<sup>96</sup>); second, because it targets symbols of capitalist and state injustice; and third, because they are the ones who decide—or not—to resort to force through a participative, deliberative decision-making process whereby those who make the decisions are also those who execute them. The militants who in their deliberations are considering using the Black Bloc tactic, with or without the use of militant force, should try as much as possible to take into account the context, the mobilizing potential of the militant coalitions, the symbolic value of their targets, the feelings of the other demonstrators, the police forces, and other pertinent factors. Needless to say, even when the members of a Black Bloc set up a deliberative organization framework, they risk making bad decisions. But at least those decisions will be their own.

ment, as illustrated by a French activist who took part in many demonstrations, including a rally against the European Union in Nice in December 2000:

There were about two hundred of us sleeping in the basement of a garage. I experienced the desolation of an itinerant sleeping on a piece of cardboard, with the cold burning into my back. I was there because we could talk about violence. We had walked out of the auditorium, where people like Susan George and Alain Krivine<sup>87</sup> were making speeches. That was the first time I thought we could disrupt people. Usually, they're the ones—on issues like illegal immigrants, et cetera—who bypass us or coopt us, who take over movements by sending their younger militants to our general meetings, but this time we jeered at them and heckled them. [VIO]

## Conclusion

The analysis presented here is an invitation to reflect and debate, and does not profess to thoroughly explain the Black Blocs, whose use of force raises numerous questions: Does it foster repression or not?<sup>88</sup> Does it project a poor image of the movement to the media?<sup>89</sup> Does it effectively exclude individuals from the movement in general?<sup>90</sup> Does it represent a step in the direction of armed struggle or “terrorism?”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the preceding portrait of the Black Blocs may create the impression that they are always well organized, which is obviously not the case. Certain Black Blocs are not even structured on the basis of affinity groups, thereby reducing the ability of their members to take part in an egalitarian decision-making process and to act in a coordinated way.

In spite of such complexities, a full-fledged simplistic mythology has grown up around the image of the Black Blocs, with the attendant risk for activists of making misguided choices. For example, certain militants' enthusiasm has led them to form Black Blocs in very small demonstrations, where they were in no position to keep the police from rounding them up before the rally had even gotten underway (although they had not broken any law).<sup>92</sup> In addition, although the Black Bloc tactic took many people by surprise in Seattle in 1999, today the police anticipate it and have even borrowed its aesthetic to infiltrate and manipulate rallies. This is precisely what took place in Geneva during the demonstrations against the G8 Summit in Évian in June 2003, when about fifteen police officers disguised as Black Blockers managed to slip through the activists' security net and into L'Usine, the community hall where the convergence center and alter-

## The Cancer in Occupy

Chris Hedges

The Black Bloc anarchists, who have been active on the streets in Oakland and other cities, are the cancer of the Occupy movement. The presence of Black Bloc anarchists—so named because they dress in black, obscure their faces, move as a unified mass, seek physical confrontations with police and destroy property—is a gift from heaven to the security and surveillance state. The Occupy encampments in various cities were shut down precisely because they were nonviolent. They were shut down because the state realized the potential of their broad appeal even to those within the systems of power. They were shut down because they articulated a truth about our economic and political system that cut across political and cultural lines. And they were shut down because they were places mothers and fathers with strollers felt safe.

Black Bloc adherents detest those of us on the organized left and seek, quite consciously, to take away our tools of empowerment. They confuse acts of petty vandalism and a repellent cynicism with revolution. The real enemies, they argue, are not the corporate capitalists, but their collaborators among the unions, workers' movements, radical intellectuals, environmental activists and populist movements such as the Zapatistas. Any group that seeks to rebuild social structures, especially through nonviolent acts of civil disobedience, rather than physically destroy, becomes, in the eyes of Black Bloc anarchists, the enemy. Black Bloc anarchists spend most of their fury not on the architects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or globalism, but on those, such as the Zapatistas, who respond to the problem. It is a grotesque inversion of value systems.

Because Black Bloc anarchists do not believe in organization, indeed oppose all organized movements, they ensure their own powerlessness. They can only be obstructionist. And they are primarily obstructionist to those who resist. John Zerzan, one of the principal ideologues of the Black Bloc movement in the United States, defended “Industrial Society and Its Future,” the rambling manifesto by Theodore Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber, although he did



not endorse Kaczynski's bombings. Zerzan is a fierce critic of a long list of supposed sellouts starting with Noam Chomsky. Black Bloc anarchists are an example of what Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture* called the "progressive adolescentization" of the American left.

In Zerzan's now defunct magazine *Green Anarchy* (which survives as a website) he published an article by someone named "Venomous Butterfly" that excoriated the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN). The essay declared that "not only are those [the Zapatistas'] aims not anarchist; they are not even revolutionary." It also denounced the indigenous movement for "nationalist language," for asserting the right of people to "alter or modify their form of government" and for having the goals of "work, land, housing, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace." The movement, the article stated, was not worthy of support because it called for "nothing concrete that could not be provided by capitalism."

"Of course," the article went on, "the social struggles of exploited and oppressed people cannot be expected to conform to some abstract anarchist ideal. These struggles arise in particular situations, sparked by specific events. The question of revolutionary solidarity in these struggles is, therefore, the question of how to intervene in a way that is fitting with one's aims, in a way that moves one's revolutionary anarchist project forward."

Solidarity becomes the hijacking or destruction of competing movements, which is exactly what the Black Bloc contingents are attempting to do with the Occupy movement.

"The Black Bloc can say they are attacking cops, but what they are really doing is destroying the Occupy movement," the writer and environmental activist Derrick Jensen told me when I reached him by phone in California. "If their real target actually was the cops and not the Occupy movement, the Black Bloc would make their actions completely separate from Occupy, instead of effectively using these others as a human shield. Their attacks on cops are simply a means to an end, which is to destroy a movement that doesn't fit their ideological standard."

"I don't have a problem with escalating tactics to some sort of militant resistance if it is appropriate morally, strategically and tactically," Jensen continued. "This is true if one is going to pick up a sign, a rock or a gun. But you need to have thought it through. The Black Bloc spends

where José Bové was distributing Roquefort cheese in front of a McDonald's. Wallach asked several workers who were accompanying her to grab one of the anarchists and take him to the police, and then asked the police to arrest him. She was upset, however, that the police did not make this particular arrest, because, in her opinion, this would have prevented the turmoil of the following day.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, there is a clash between two visions of democracy within the movement. The concept of representative democracy is defended by the self-proclaimed representatives of the movement. And to represent a community—whether a social movement or a nation—one must assert that it is a homogeneous political entity that speaks with one voice, that is, the voice of its representative. Specifically addressing the issue of "tactical diversity," Susan George affirms that this approach is unworkable because "there would be no unity within the demonstration and *no clear message* would be transmitted to the outside world."<sup>83</sup> What George is suggesting here is that, having excluded the deviants, she can represent the entire movement.

For anarchists, on the other hand, it is not a matter of representing the movement, nor, of course, of sending representatives to the media or the negotiating tables of official summits.<sup>84</sup> In the words of Murray Bookchin, then an anarchist, "the slogan 'Power to the people' can only be put into practice when the power exercised by social elites is dissolved into the people.... If 'Power to the people' means nothing more than power to the 'leaders' of the people, then the people remain an undifferentiated, manipulable mass."<sup>85</sup> From this anarchist perspective, therefore, riots and autonomous direct actions can be usefully associated with the "plebeian experience" as conceptualized by Martin Breugh, that is, as an insurrectional moment fuelled by a strong desire—a passion—for freedom that fractures the social and political order of domination. According to Breugh, "[I]nsurrectionary practice shares in...a particular conception of democracy as the unmediated exercise of political sovereignty" by the plebe, that is without political representation of the people's sovereignty and power.<sup>86</sup>

The Black Blockers and their allies see the Movement for Global Justice as a heterogeneous multitude, a "movement of movements," that cannot be represented without the general will being necessarily oversimplified by the representatives. Moreover, representatives invariably develop personal interests separate from the "common good" of those they wish to represent. Feeling betrayed, Black Blockers and their allies sometimes deliberately disrupt speeches by "leaders" of the move-

“rioters.” Thus, subsequent to the disturbances that occurred in parallel with the G8 Summit in Genoa in July 2001, Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister and President of the European Union, made the following demand: “I want to hear those in charge of all the movements and democratic parties, throughout the world, distance themselves from the rioters.”<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Juan Tortosa, coordinator of the Forum Social Lémanique (convened in parallel with the G8 in Évian in June 2003) drew a clear boundary between the alter-globalization movement and the “rioters:” “We firmly condemn this kind of violent action, which is *completely foreign* to the Movement for Global Justice.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Christophe Aguiton, “international relations officer” of ATTAC, while supposedly more radical than Susan George, denounced the police violence in Genoa but asserted in the same breath that the Social Forum “was *legitimated*, in Italy and well beyond, *through its ability to detach itself from the violence* committed by certain groups of demonstrators.”<sup>76</sup>

It is therefore advantageous for the social movement “leaders” to turn their back very explicitly on the “violent” elements, even as they claim to control the movement. Hence, in an interview on the France 2 network, José Bové, member of the Confédération paysanne and without doubt the best-known spokesperson of the Movement for Global Justice in France, denounced “a number of *uncontrolled* groups who attempted to destabilize” the demonstrations against the G8 Summit in Genoa.<sup>77</sup> Susan George, meanwhile, states that it is necessary “to *totally impose* non-violence in our ranks” to achieve a “*disciplined* activism.”<sup>78</sup> For those identifying themselves as the leaders of the movement, what is at stake is the control and homogenization of the rank and file, even if this requires denigration and exclusion. Regarding the Black Blocs in particular, George writes that they amount to “a handful of individuals who, effectively, propose nothing at all,”<sup>79</sup> adding, with reference to the anti-G8 rallies in Évian, that the “rioters” were part of a “minority subculture...the ‘black-leather heavy-metal spike-hair’ unwashed of Zurich, whose only goal in life is apparently to riot. Only a qualified psychologist or anthropologist could say whether they have the slightest interest in politics.”<sup>80</sup> The condemnation of and contempt for the Black Blocs and their allies expressed in this discourse, implicitly or explicitly legitimates, and thus smoothes the way for, their repression and criminalization.<sup>81</sup>

The case of Lori Wallach, American lobbyist and director of Global Trade Watch, is emblematic in this connection. She explained in an interview that on the eve of the direct actions of 30 November in Seattle, some “anarchists” wanted to smash windows during an event

more time attempting to destroy movements than they do attacking those in power. They hate the left more than they hate capitalists.”

“Their thinking is not only nonstrategic, but actively opposed to strategy,” said Jensen, author of several books, including *The Culture of Make Believe*. “They are unwilling to think critically about whether one is acting appropriately in the moment. I have no problem with someone violating boundaries [when] that violation is the smart, appropriate thing to do. I have a huge problem with people violating boundaries for the sake of violating boundaries. It is a lot easier to pick up a rock and throw it through the nearest window than it is to organize, or at least figure out which window you should throw a rock through if you are going to throw a rock. A lot of it is laziness.”

Groups of Black Bloc protesters, for example, smashed the windows of a locally owned coffee shop in November in Oakland and looted it. It was not, as Jensen points out, a strategic, moral or tactical act. It was done for its own sake. Random acts of violence, looting and vandalism are justified, in the jargon of the movement, as components of “feral” or “spontaneous insurrection.” These acts, the movement argues, can never be organized. Organization, in the thinking of the movement, implies hierarchy, which must always be opposed. There can be no restraints on “feral” or “spontaneous” acts of insurrection. Whoever gets hurt gets hurt. Whatever gets destroyed gets destroyed.

There is a word for this—“criminal.”

The Black Bloc movement is infected with a deeply disturbing hyper-masculinity. This hypermasculinity, I expect, is its primary appeal. It taps into the lust that lurks within us to destroy, not only things but human beings. It offers the godlike power that comes with mob violence. Marching as a uniformed mass, all dressed in black to become part of an anonymous bloc, faces covered, temporarily overcomes alienation, feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness and loneliness. It imparts to those in the mob a sense of comradeship. It permits an inchoate rage to be unleashed on any target. Pity, compassion and tenderness are banished for the intoxication of power. It is the same sickness that fuels the swarms of police who pepper-spray and beat peaceful demonstrators. It is the sickness of soldiers in war. It turns human beings into beasts.

“We run on,” Erich Maria Remarque wrote in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, “overwhelmed by this wave that bears us along, that fills us with ferocity, turns us into thugs, into murderers, into God only

knows what devils: this wave that multiplies our strength with fear and madness and greed of life, seeking and fighting for nothing but our deliverance.”

The corporate state understands and welcomes the language of force. It can use the Black Bloc’s confrontational tactics and destruction of property to justify draconian forms of control and frighten the wider population away from supporting the Occupy movement. Once the Occupy movement is painted as a flag-burning, rock-throwing, angry mob we are finished. If we become isolated we can be crushed. The arrests last weekend in Oakland of more than 400 protesters, some of whom had thrown rocks, carried homemade shields and rolled barricades, are an indication of the scale of escalating repression and a failure to remain a unified, nonviolent opposition. Police pumped tear gas, flash-bang grenades and “less lethal” rounds into the crowds. Once protesters were in jail they were denied crucial medications, kept in overcrowded cells and pushed around. A march in New York called in solidarity with the Oakland protesters saw a few demonstrators imitate the Black Bloc tactics in Oakland, including throwing bottles at police and dumping garbage on the street. They chanted “Fuck the police” and “Racist, sexist, anti-gay / NYPD go away.”

This is a struggle to win the hearts and minds of the wider public and those within the structures of power (including the police) who are possessed of a conscience. It is not a war. Nonviolent movements, on some level, embrace police brutality. The continuing attempt by the state to crush peaceful protesters who call for simple acts of justice delegitimizes the power elite. It prompts a passive population to respond. It brings some within the structures of power to our side and creates internal divisions that will lead to paralysis within the network of authority. Martin Luther King kept holding marches in Birmingham because he knew Public Safety Commissioner “Bull” Connor was a thug who would overreact.

The Black Bloc’s thought-terminating cliché of “diversity of tactics” in the end opens the way for hundreds or thousands of peaceful marchers to be discredited by a handful of hooligans. The state could not be happier. It is a safe bet that among Black Bloc groups in cities such as Oakland are agents provocateurs spurring them on to more mayhem. But with or without police infiltration the Black Bloc is serving the interests of the 1 percent. These anarchists represent no one but themselves. Those in Oakland, although most are white and many are not from the city, arrogantly dismiss Oakland’s African-American leaders, who, along with other local community organizers, should be determining the forms of resistance.

tions because “the violence diverts the media, hence public opinion, away from the message of 99% of the participants in the movement.”<sup>69</sup> At the Gothenburg Summit of the European Union in June 2001, for instance, George deplors that events in the street drew public attention away from the televised debate featuring European politicians and seven representatives of the movement, including herself! (Yet a study has shown that the riots in Gothenburg are what made possible ATTAC’s “meteoric rise on the Swedish political scene”<sup>70</sup>). And Fabien Lefrançois of the French group Agir Ici, has admitted that “the violent actions of the Black Bloc served *our* purposes at one point.... But they threaten to do us a disservice in the long run.”<sup>71</sup>

Such declarations raise the whole question of the effectiveness and representativeness of social movements in general and of collective forms of action, both violent and nonviolent, in particular. Unfortunately, sociology offers no clear response to this question. Analyses of this issue are rare and their results are inconsistent.<sup>72</sup> In each case, the effectiveness of a militant action or a social movement must always be quantified. What is at issue: the capacity to mobilize? media exposure? achieving a favorable power relationship vis-à-vis the “enemies?” recruiting allies or gaining ascendancy over them? showing an example to the constituencies one claims to represent? obtaining public funding? having an impact on electoral politics? The effectiveness of a social movement or a demonstration must, in addition, factor in the heterogeneity of the actors; “effectiveness” would no doubt be defined one way by a newcomer to the movement, and another way by a veteran activist or a person hoping to build a career in a political party or a militant who has been given an official title (e.g., “president,” “treasurer,” “media spokesperson”) by his or her organization, and so on. Academics and leaders of social movements, for their part, tend to conceive of effectiveness in terms of systemic gains: electoral success, greater representation within official institutions, a larger share of collective resources.<sup>73</sup>

In point of fact, the state has erected an entire normalizing apparatus and exercises control over the official political arena through government policy, official communications channels, grants, and criteria for exclusion. In the Movement for Global Justice, the Peoples’ Summits and Social Forums are partially state financed, NGOs receive state subsidies, NGO representatives are invited to informal discussions at G8 summits and to debates at the World Economic Forum in Davos, and some of them are even recruited by the World Bank. Moreover, the official political elite has publically voiced its wish to see the leaders of the movement discipline the demonstrators and repudiate the

slightly pointless discussions about violence versus nonviolence, man, and what is violence anyway when the State is like killing people every day, man? And the people in the World Bank eat Third World babies for breakfast, so if they get bricked, then hey, that's their fault.<sup>62</sup>

The notion of respect for tactical diversity put forward by the CLAC and the experiences of activists generally fostered greater cooperation, which over the years as made the boundaries between blocs more permeable and led to hybrid experiences. The following are examples of this development. At the G8 Summit in Évian in 2003, a 1,500-strong Pink Bloc carried out blocking actions in Lausanne, in coordination with a Black Bloc of 500 activists.<sup>63</sup> During this action, the Pink & Silver Bloc, which was the initial target of the police, maneuvered to position itself behind the Black Bloc, which defended it. In Scotland in 2005, the Black Bloc set out from the eco-village of Stirling (a temporary self-governed camp) on a “suicide march” to draw the attention of the police away from a battalion of clowns who were endeavoring to block the highways. A few hours later, the clowns surrounded the police, who had surrounded the Black Bloc; the clowns mocked and distracted the police while showing their solidarity with the trapped militants.<sup>64</sup> Finally, at Cancun during the rallies against the WTO in 2003, the Black Bloc waited for the green light from the Latin-American *campesinos* (farm workers) who were heading the march, before working their way up to the front to stand alongside them, at which point they all attacked the security fence together.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Black Blocs and the Leaders of the Movement for Global Justice**

The Black Bloc tactic also allows, explicitly or implicitly, anarchist militants to contest, both symbolically and in practice, the nongovernmental organizations' pretensions to leadership of the Movement for Global Justice. The stakes are considerable: Who directs and represents the movement? Who speaks on its behalf? The statements of Susan George, vice president of the French organization ATTAC,<sup>66</sup> provide revealing examples of an approach whereby, in discrediting the Black Blocs and their allies, self-proclaimed “leaders” or “representatives” seek to shape a vast movement according to their own goals and interests. Susan George claims to discuss militant violence from a political perspective “beyond any moral considerations”<sup>67</sup> and condemns “this violence for political, practical, and tactical reasons.”<sup>68</sup> She opposes breaking windows or confronting the police at demonstra-

The explosive rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement came when a few women, trapped behind orange mesh netting, were pepper-sprayed by NYPD Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna. The violence and cruelty of the state were exposed. And the Occupy movement, through its steadfast refusal to respond to police provocation, resonated across the country. Losing this moral authority, this ability to show through nonviolent protest the corruption and decadence of the corporate state, would be crippling to the movement. It would reduce us to the moral degradation of our oppressors. And that is what our oppressors want.

The Black Bloc movement bears the rigidity and dogmatism of all absolutism sects. Its adherents alone possess the truth. They alone understand. They alone arrogate the right, because they are enlightened and we are not, to dismiss and ignore competing points of view as infantile and irrelevant. They hear only their own voices. They heed only their own thoughts. They believe only their own clichés. And this makes them not only deeply intolerant but stupid.

“Once you are hostile to organization and strategic thinking the only thing that remains is lifestyle purity,” Jensen said. “Lifestylism’ has supplanted organization in terms of a lot of mainstream environmental thinking. Instead of opposing the corporate state, [lifestylism maintains] we should use less toilet paper and should compost. This attitude is ineffective. Once you give up on organizing or are hostile to it, all you are left with is this hyperpurity that becomes rigid dogma. You attack people who, for example, use a telephone. This is true with vegans and questions of diet. It is true with anti-car activists toward those who drive cars. It is the same with the anarchists. When I called the police after I received death threats I became to Black Bloc anarchists ‘a pig lover.’”

“If you live on Ogoni land and you see that Ken Saro-Wiwa is murdered for acts of nonviolent resistance,” Jensen said, “if you see that the land is still being trashed, then you might think about escalating. I don’t have a problem with that. But we have to go through the process of trying to work with the system and getting screwed. It is only then that we get to move beyond it. We can’t short-circuit the process. There is a maturation process we have to go through, as individuals and as a movement. We can’t say, ‘Hey, I’m going to throw a flowerpot at a cop because it is fun.’”

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of their bodies to crash through police lines, occasionally throwing inner tubes as well. The Tute Bianche first went into action in Prague in September 2000, but their most important battle took place in Genoa on the occasion of the G8 Summit of July 2001. There they succeeded in mobilizing some fifteen thousand people to march on the security fence, massed behind protective plexiglas panels mounted on wheels. Soon after its departure from the Carlini Stadium, the contingent was viciously attacked by the police and broke up into different groups, some of which chose to disperse while others preferred to stand and fight. Similar groups have been created in Australia, Spain, Finland, and Great Britain, where they are known as WOMBLES.<sup>59</sup>

The Pink Blocs, otherwise known as the Pink & Silver Blocs or Carnival Blocs, bring together militants in zany, carnivalesque costumes whose goal is to meld politics, art, and pleasure in a single action.<sup>60</sup> Various tasks are divided among different affinity groups: construction of barricades, street theater and giant puppet shows, samba band performances, provision of first aid, among others. The origins of the Pink Blocs go back to Reclaim the Streets, a British group known for its anticapitalist carnivals, and Rhythms of Resistance, a troupe of militant percussionists whose more mobile, offensive approach has brought them into direct contact with police lines. The Pink Bloc first drew public attention in Prague in September 2000, when they managed to skirt around the police and move close enough to the convention center to oblige organizers to evacuate the site and cancel the closing session of the meeting.

Relationships among the blocs at large demonstrations have not always been smooth, but over the years they seem to have improved through negotiation, which has strengthened the solidarity among militants and increased their tactical effectiveness. During the period 1999–2001, cohesion and solidarity among the blocs was sapped primarily by the violence vs. nonviolence debate. In the 1990s, the expression “fluffy vs. spiky” was often used to summarize this debate, with “fluffy” signifying exemplary, responsible, nonviolent behavior, and “spiky” referring to confrontation and the use of force.<sup>61</sup> At first glance, the Black Bloc would be assumed to represent the spikiest tactic, and the Pink & Silver Blocs, the fluffiest. But already in 2000, at the rallies in Prague, a member of Tactical Frivolity, a group which took part in the Pink & Silver Bloc and was comprised of women disguised as giant fairies, declared:

I was quite glad we avoided having a general “fluffy” versus “spiky” debate.... [W]e didn’t have interminable, divisive, and



been founded ahead of the Évian G8 Summit to allow these groups to organize and take part in the grand “unitary” march. The CLAAACG8’s aim was for the red and black contingent to exceed the size of the other organizations participating in the unitary march (green and communist parties, unions, and others). This political objective implied that the anarchist demonstrators had to be held in check by the organizers, who were concerned that their media strategy would be undermined if things got out of hand. While paying lip service to tactical diversity, the CLAAACG8 created its own corps of marshals to prevent the red and black contingent from being used, in the words of an organizer, as an “aircraft carrier,” that is, a base that those wanting to carry out autonomous actions could set out from or pull back to. This strategic decision was denounced by many autonomous groups and individuals (as well as some members of the groups involved in the CLAAACG8, speaking on their own behalf), who were disappointed that anarchist organizations would rate the success of *their* rally by comparing themselves to other political organizations and in light of the assessments of the official media, whether private or state owned. During the demonstration as such, a handful of anarchists from Strasbourg and elsewhere formed a small contingent calling itself the “reluctant CLAAAC,” which marched behind the anarchist marshals shouting caustic slogans about the “libertarian police.” The supporters of the CLAAACG8’s strategic approach were nevertheless very pleased at having reached their objective: the red and black contingent was five to six thousand strong, making it the largest anarchist contingent in the history of France as well as the largest contingent of the unitary march, as noted by newspapers like *Le Monde*. Nevertheless, Black Blocs did go into action on an autonomous basis at the anti-G8 mobilization in Évian, and at other times and places, such as in Geneva or during the street-blocking actions in Lausanne and Annemasse.

### Other Blocs

The Movement for Global Justice encompasses three other types of “blocs” intended for those who favor confrontation but who do not feel in tune with the Black Blocs. The White Blocs, also known as Tute Bianche (White Overalls), originated in the Italian social centers (political squats) and are very close to the Communist Youth organizations, unemployed workers’ movements, and the Zapatistas of Chiapas. As is true of the Black Blocs, their uniforms provide them with anonymity. Although nonviolent, their offensive attitude distinguishes their approach from that of Ghandi or King. They wear makeshift armor (foam rubber pads, helmets, gloves, masks, leg protectors) and advance with their arms linked, using the collective mass

## Activists and Anarchists Speak for Themselves at Occupy Oakland

Susie Cagle

January 28 was not supposed to turn out the way it did. After Occupy Oakland failed to occupy its first two targeted buildings and had a short-lived street battle in front of the Oakland Museum, police in riot gear contained the march of nearly 1,000 in a public park. There was a dispersal order, but no means of escape. Protesters with shields attempted to push the police line, which responded with several volleys of tear gas into the crowd, still trapped. Instead of enduring the gas, the crowd pulled down chain-link fencing that separated them from the street and safety.

As marchers, both masked and bare faced, continued north, taking the street, they chanted powerfully, suddenly and without reservation:

“When Oakland is under attack, what do we do?”

“Stand up, fight back!”

As the move-in committee said Monday in a statement on January 28: “This time, the chant was not an empty one.”

“A lot of anarchists today who are actively involved at all levels of the occupy movement—if you want to talk about inspiration, they look to places like Greece,” says Tim Simons, an organizer with Occupy Oakland.

But so does Hedges. In May of 2010, amid global financial faltering, Hedges celebrated the Greek insurrection:

They know what to do when corporations pillage and loot their country. They know what to do when they are told their pensions, benefits and jobs have to be cut to pay corporate banks, which screwed them in the first place. Call a general strike. Riot. Shut down the city centers. Toss the bastards out.

Do not be afraid of the language of class warfare—the rich versus the poor, the oligarchs versus the citizens, the capitalists versus the proletariat.

But those strikes, riots and shut-downs in America are troubling to Hedges and other Occupy Oakland critics on the left. These critics focus on property destruction—such as the tearing down of those fences on January 28—by perceived black bloc “hooligans” as a discrediting force in the movement, even while they understand the role of focused property destruction at, say, the Boston Tea Party, or in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union’s struggle against EGT in Longview, Washington.

What many activists find most troubling is not the conclusions those critics draw about tactical choices within the movement, but the lack of information they apparently have in arriving at these conclusions and a lack of interest in why those tactical choices were made in the first place.

For example, they find Hedges’ conflation of political ideology and protest strategy, at its core, problematic, as well as his apparent misunderstanding of the local Oakland activist community.

Oakland’s large, active, organized community of anarchists and other political radicals are just that: large; active; and, above all, organized. It is true that many are young, white and not Oakland natives, though they are residents. But many believe in community building and mutual aid. And many of those using black bloc at occupy protests are not necessarily anarchists.

Hedges “is really out of touch with anarchists today,” says Simons, who dismisses John Zerzan, the anarchist ideologue Hedges points to as the Black Bloc forefather. “Anarchists were very important in creating Occupy Oakland. They were in some ways the initial glue that held the camp together”—the one Hedges applauds as having such “broad appeal” that cities were forced to shut them down using oppressive means. “Very quickly Occupy Oakland became much more than that, but you wouldn’t have Occupy Oakland if it wasn’t for those anarchists,” says Simons.

The 99 percent is a poor class analysis, especially for troubled Oakland, but it does point to the broad coalition necessary to create change in America today. “In this situation, even to make the most modest gains, you have to bring about a force that’s nearly a revolu-

group together in affinity groups of volunteers medics, for example” [BB1, emphasis added]. The respect for tactical diversity thus relates to an ideal of autonomy centered on a radical definition of the principles of freedom and equality. Hence, one activist who had taken part in a number of affinity groups without ever resorting to force believes “that *respect for the diversity of tactics* is essential. Each person must do what she or he thinks is right.... When it comes to violence...I know perfectly well that I don’t have all the answers on the subject of violence/nonviolence, so I’m not going to prevent people from doing what they want to do; I don’t want that sort of power” [GA7, emphasis added]. Yet, despite the abundance of references in their discourse to equality and citizens’ participation, the vast majority of organizations within the Movement for Global Justice do not respect tactical diversity, nor do they welcome this sort of militant pluralism.

### **Anarchy Under Scrutiny**

The fact is, however, that certain anti-authoritarian or anarchist organizations do not respect tactical diversity either. Cases in point are the Direct Action Network (DAN) in Seattle and the Convergence des luttes anti-autoritaires et anti-capitalistes contre le G8 (CLAAACG8, Convergence of Anti-Authoritarian and Anti-Capitalist Struggles Against the G8) in France. Prior to the rallies of 30 November 1999 in Seattle, the affinity groups allied under the banner of the DAN had publically announced their planned nonviolent actions. A number of participants were shocked by the action of the Black Bloc, feeling that it was the “rioters” duty to comply with the consensus on nonviolence and to defer their use of force until the following day. The Black Blockers argued in return that they were not bound by the DAN consensus since their actions were carried out independently of the coalition and in another part of the city. In the case of the DAN, tactical diversity was condemned on grounds of morality (many members of the coalition were dogmatic defenders of nonviolence), tactics (many wrongly claimed that the violent police repression had been provoked by the actions of the Black Blocs), strategy (many correctly noted that the Black Blocs had attracted media attention quite out of proportion with their numbers), and politics (many considered the DAN to be the pivotal political community and therefore authorized to define which actions were acceptable on 30 November).

In the case of the CLAAACG8, the factors are more systemic. Unlike the Montreal CLAC, which was comprised of autonomous individuals and affinity groups, the CLAAACG8 was an umbrella organization made up of various French and European anarchist groups.<sup>58</sup> It had

vate or state-owned media vehicles), and skirmishes with the police.

The CLAC developed the notion of tactical diversity in spatial terms as well, identifying three zones in large demonstrations: green, yellow, and red. The green zone is a sanctuary where demonstrators are in no danger of being arrested. The yellow zone involves a minor risk of being arrested. The red zone is intended for individuals and affinity groups favoring more aggressive tactics. (Note that the police do not necessarily abide by these divisions, as evidenced by the arrest of 240 people assembled in the green zone during rallies against the WTO in Montreal in July 2003.)

Tactical diversity had taken shape in the streets well before the creation of the CLAC, such as in Prague in September 2000, where specific zones had already been designated by different colors. The CLAC felt that the tactical diversity emerging on the ground should be bolstered through appropriate mobilization, organization, and discourse. The idea of “respect for the diversity of tactics” was furthermore the result of certain historical particularities of activism in Montreal. In the late 1990s many members of CLAC had worked in SalAMI, a group established to protest against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI, or AMI in French)<sup>57</sup> through non-violent civil disobedience and voluntary mass arrests. Over time, the leaders of SalAMI had become increasingly authoritarian and given to “moralizing” [F7] about nonviolence, while publically admonishing the *casseurs* (rioters) of other militant groups on several occasions. At a rally held on 15 March 2000 by the Collectif opposé à la brutalité policière (COBP, Committee Opposed to Police Brutality) in Montreal, demonstrators clashed with the police, a McDonald’s and some banks were attacked, and over a hundred people arrested. The leaders of SalAMI, along with those of the Mouvement action justice (MAJ—Action Justice Movement), proceeded once again to condemn publicly the *casseurs* and blame on the demonstrators. This dogmatic and polemical approach toward nonviolence, together with the ever more authoritarian structure of the organization, led a number of militants to abandon it and join the CLAC or other militant groups, where they encouraged respect for tactical diversity.

Ultimately, then, many Black Blockers are quite comfortable with tactical diversity and pluralism with regard to the forms of collective action at demonstrations. According to one interviewee who had participated in various affinity groups within Black Blocs, “I never obliged anyone to throw anything. I’m for the *diversity of tactics*, and there are Black Bloc members who don’t want to use force and who

tionary force,” says Simons. “We have to show that we can fully disrupt the system, even if we just want reforms.”

Of course, many within Occupy Oakland do not just want reforms—they want revolution, insurrection, overthrow and smash. But there has been only one event where that group came out in a bloc and utilized the tactics that so trouble Hedges and other Occupy Oakland critics on the left and it happened in the middle of what is arguably still seen as one of the movement’s greatest victories: the General Strike.

On November 2, an autonomously organized anti-capitalist black bloc marched through Oakland, destroying windows and other property at banks and, allegedly, strike-busting businesses such as Whole Foods.

The tactic, which emerged in the early 1980s in Germany among autonomist protesters defending squatters rights and anti-nuclear activism, hit America hard in the anti-globalization demonstrations of the late ‘90s, especially in the “Battle of Seattle,” which resulted in heavy damage of multinational retail property in downtown. That November 2 march was arguably one of the most focused showings of stateside black bloc in a decade. That march resulted in the Oakland police calling in mutual aid, but it did not result in a discrediting of the national movement; tens of thousands still marched on the Port of Oakland hours later.

“That was at the height of the Occupy movement; that was as it was cresting,” says Simons. “There was so much else going on, you couldn’t isolate that and point to it as the singular problem. And now the militancy of Oakland is sort of like the only thing out there.” The peaceful but militant blockade of the Port of Oakland on December 12, with its lack of union leader support, garnered Occupy Oakland more criticism than the black bloc actions on November 2.

Black bloc is not a lifestyle choice, but a tactical one. When a protester takes off their mask and unzips their black jacket—as many did after that November 2 march—they are no longer “black bloc.” A protester who engages in black bloc tactics on one march may not choose to engage in them again on another.

Hedges condemns property destruction in political protest by condemning black bloc tactics, regardless of the facts. The “local coffee shop” vandalism Hedges contends was committed by black bloc was

in fact one window of a corporate coffee chain smashed in that post-strike fog of war—and by someone not wearing a mask, not wearing black. The people who broke into City Hall on January 28, and many of those who destroyed property there, were also largely unmasked. And both of these acts came immediately after, as in within minutes of, violent mass kettling and arrest actions.

Of course, when Hedges and other critics pointed to Occupy Oakland's failures on January 28, they were not talking about black bloc—those torn fences and an autonomous and unfocused city hall melee were the only property destruction Oakland saw that day. No, they mean Occupy protesters who choose to stand up to the police. And for Hedges and others on the left hoping Occupy makes strides toward national change, standing up to the police is a public relations liability and those who do it should be “purged” from the movement—an arguably violent claim in and of itself.

“People want a boogeyman,” says occupier Laura Long. “They want to know what’s failing. And they want to blame it on someone.” Mayor Jean Quan repeatedly points to Occupy Oakland's lack of a nonviolence resolution as justification for repeated crackdowns and arrests. As one Oakland occupier said recently, “Even if we had a non-violence proposal, they'd still shoot us.” And people would still throw things, as they do at Occupy Wall Street, which has a stated nonviolent mission.

The “diversity of tactics” Occupy Oakland embraces are ostensibly meant to promote a range of protest. “There is nothing preventing those who want to from organizing non-violent direct actions autonomously with clear guidelines as such,” wrote the January 28 move-in committee. “This is what we mean by diversity of tactics.”

Those who promote the necessity at times for property destruction in protest point to the history of violent revolution worldwide. “Even Gandhi wasn't in a bubble,” one occupier said. “Others were being violent around him. That revolution took all tactics.”

Hedges writes that the “cliché of ‘diversity of tactics’ in the end opens the way for hundreds or thousands of peaceful marchers to be discredited by a handful of hooligans. The state could not be happier.”

At least so long as they can squash those hooligans. “I think it was tactically embarrassing,” says occupier Steven Angell of January 28. “Luckily there was little to no framing to it, except for, ‘Fuck you,

in hand. Some targets were attacked, others left intact as a result of these discussions.”<sup>54</sup>

The first activist [GA7] drew certain conclusions about how this affected the dynamic between demonstrators and the police:

The police officers see you as a crowd and assume you're going to act like a crowd. The affinity group model disrupts that dynamic: you don't act like a crowd anymore but like a rational being. Affinity groups help us realize our own power. The police are still surprised and baffled by affinity groups. They're thinking, “We have water cannons, tear gas, but here are these people who are supposed to run away, holding a meeting to decide what they're going to do!”

Such accounts bring to mind the thesis of sociologist Francesca Polletta, whereby direct democracy and consensus within social movements are highly valuable because they foster (self-)organization, innovation, and cohesion among activists themselves.<sup>55</sup>

### Respect for Diversity of Tactics

The issue of political boundaries arises when the time comes to delineate the contours of the deliberative, autonomous community. Can a group of several dozen amilitants, for example, legitimately decide to resort to violence when participating in a rally that includes thousands of nonviolent demonstrators, at the risk of turning them—without their consent—into the targets of police violence? In coming to grips with this political problem, the *Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes (CLAC, Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles)* of Montreal (2000–2005) put forward the principle of “respect for tactical diversity,” which addresses the valorization of political autonomy while stressing the legitimate heterogeneity of forms of protest within a single movement.

The CLAC was founded in April 2000 to organize “radical” demonstrations jointly with the *Comité d'accueil du Sommet des Amériques (CASA, Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee)* of Quebec City.<sup>56</sup> The respect for tactical diversity, together with the deliberate absence of marshals, meant that those taking part in CLAC rallies could in principle carry out actions along a very broad spectrum, ranging from street theater to strikes against symbolic targets (such as the security fence at the Quebec Summit of the Americas, banks, pri-



wishing to set up a Black Bloc may meet to plan and coordinate their operations weeks, days, hours, or minutes before, or even in the middle of a rally. Since Black Blocs are independent, their actions vary, and they do not necessarily resort to violence during a demonstration. For example, this is how a participant in a rally where *sans-papiers* (illegal immigrants) were in danger of being confronted by the police, summed up the situation: “You can afford to spend a night in jail, but not them.”<sup>53</sup> The demonstration of 21 November 2002 against the NATO Summit in Prague provides another illustration of the tactical and political flexibility of Black Blockers. While some three thousand anarcho-communists were marching in the highly militarized city, a police car infiltrated the demonstration, cranking the tension up a notch. Sensing a provocation, the Black Blockers calculated that the demonstrators were disadvantaged and would be at great risk in the event of a flare-up. Consequently, they protected the vehicle so as to discourage any attack, which would have handed the police a pretext for brutal repression.

The June 2003 rallies in Lausanne and Annemasse against the G8 Summit exemplify the ways in which the affinity group structure can be tactically effective and at the same time politically valorizing for the individuals involved in an action, even in complex situations, as witnessed by one of the demonstrators [GA7]:

I found it extraordinary that we could hold delegates’ meetings right in the middle of the blocking action. There were barricades, fires had been lit, the police were slinging a lot of tear gas. And still, a meeting was called, with someone yelling, “meeting in ten minutes near the road sign.” The meeting took place barely a few hundred meters from where the police stood, and it allowed us to decide on our course of action.... [E]veryone had the chance to inform the others of what the needs were: “We need reinforcements against the police,” “we need help building the barricades,” “we should send people out to reconnoiter...,” et cetera.... So we were able to act dynamically in the midst of the action without just one person shouting, “we must do this or that!”

This account is confirmed by another participant at these same rallies: “This property damage is not ‘random vandalism’; it is highly political and usually carefully targeted. On Sunday [during the June 2003 protest against the G8 in vian] I saw debates between different groups (and languages!) about the politics of different targets, stones

we’re the Oakland Commune.’ Which I don’t know if that constitutes framing.”

Hedges goes on to criticize black bloc protesters as using pacifists as “human shields.” While Occupy Oakland has not passed a resolution stating as much, demonstrations have followed the St. Paul’s Principles, which arose from protests at the Republican National Convention in 2008—“a separation of time and place,” according to Simons. This has held true since the November 2 General Strike devolved into a confusing mess of those diverse tactics, as some occupiers tried to take and hold a building, while others were more focused on lighting barricades on fire.

The much-covered weekly “Fuck the Police” marches, autonomous actions “in solidarity” with Occupy Oakland, explicitly acknowledge if not condone targeted property destruction and dissuade “peace police.” Families with children broke off from the march to the building on January 28, before the brief street battle.

“There was no black bloc. The front lines of the street battle that captured all the images were peace signs. No one even mentions it: that was the image of clashing with the police,” says Angell. “If that’s what a black bloc is, that’s depressing to me. I personally am not going to throw a brick through a window, but I have some investment in the black bloc as a tactic and if that’s what it is, if that’s it at its most threatening, then that’s just really sad.”

Angell promotes community organizing and substantive outreach as a way of growing the movement, but does not rule out the necessity of more militant tactics. Others who were shot at that day, including Simons, contend that “shield bloc” moved as one, and “really saved our asses” from further injury. “People were more aware and there was more communication that day than in past conflicts with police,” says Simons. “In that way, it was a success.”

To say, as Hedges does, that Occupy protesters across the country who threw bottles last week were “imitating” Oakland, were taken by that black bloc cancer, is to ignore a long history of destruction in protest by which activists are inspired, whether one might perceive that destruction to be tactical or not.

The tactical questions Hedges raises on Occupy Oakland’s behalf are not unjustified. The radical inclusivity that Occupy Oakland champions in its diversity of tactics has and does alienate those dedicated



to wholly nonviolent protest. But just as after the failed building occupation on November 2, Bay Area occupiers are questioning their strategies moving forward. Governments meet force with force—this is the tactic they understand best and may be the best argument against premature insurrection.

A full plastic water bottle lobbed at police in full riot gear, whether it hits one of them or not, is enough to legally warrant the shooting of less lethal, rubber-coated steel bullets at a crowd. Occupiers, of course, threw more than just water bottles on January 28—glass bottles, bricks, lawn chairs—but police, according to their own statements, sustained no injuries beyond two small cuts and one bruise. They sent more than one protester to the hospital that day for broken bones, internal bleeding and nerve damage. No one can agree on who attacked first.

The buildings Occupy Oakland marched toward were not targeted for destruction, but for squatting, for organization and for political and community building. And the protesters who came armed with plastic, wood and metal shields, who both moved on and defended others from the police, were not a bloc, were not dressed in black and did not move as one unit.

But Occupy Oakland was outmatched on January 28 and their efforts were met with overwhelming force.

“They got the sexy spectacle, which is what a lot of people were after, I think,” says Long. “And a lot of occupy groups from all over got to have their fantasy happen elsewhere—they didn’t have to live through the danger, but they got the sexy imagery of their comrades going through this sort of battle scene.” And they didn’t get their building.

When is, as Occupy Oakland says, “smashy-smashy” used for ostensibly political purposes and when is it an emotional reaction?

As one anarchist occupier said at a general assembly after November 2, “It’s a lot more violent to foreclose on somebody and throw them out of a house than throw a rock through a window. And if that’s how people deal with things, then that’s how they get it out and we can’t tell people how to live.”

That institutionalized violence against people, especially people in Oakland, is something these critics gloss over. Some in Occupy Oakland call a consistent pacifist protest approach a “position of

principles of freedom and equality. The relatively small size of an affinity group allows its amilitants to determine their actions collectively through consensual deliberations. It is true that the affinity group structure does not prevent the occurrence of informal power games based on the charisma, experience, and skills of individual members, and on their cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender privileges. However, unlike the situation in hierarchical organizations, people involved in an affinity group or a Black Bloc cannot use their informal power and privileges to take over positions of vested authority from which they could wield formal as well as informal power and, thus, officially impose their will on their “subordinates.” In addition, since Black Blocs are ephemeral, there are limited possibilities for an influential individual to consolidate his or her power within the group. Furthermore, some affinity groups take specific measures to minimize the disparities of informal power, such as giving priority in discussions to those asking to speak for the first time, or alternating the turns to speak between men and women.<sup>52</sup>

The primacy of friendship in affinity groups is conducive to the voluntary division of militant tasks within a Black Bloc. Depending on the situation and their individual dispositions, some participants may opt for offensive actions (arming themselves with clubs, slingshots, billiard balls, or even Molotov cocktails), while others will focus on defense (outfitting themselves with shields, chest protectors, gloves, shin guards, helmets gas masks, and the like). Still others may choose to carry out reconnaissance and communications operations (on foot or bicycle and equipped with walky-talkies or mobile telephones); act as volunteer nurses (street medics), bringing relief to tear gas or pepper spray victims and administering first aid to the injured; carry banners and flags; or maintain troupe morale with percussion instruments. Those who prefer not to engage in actions on the street may form affinity groups in charge of legal support in the event of arrests, arrange media contacts, or take care of other auxiliary needs like transportation, lodging, water, and food supplies. Finally, a number of activists may simply join the Black Bloc in the street, wearing black clothes and masks, with no specific equipment or task, ready to improvise according to how the demonstration unfolds.

In keeping with the spirit of the *Autonomen* of the previous generation and with anarchist tradition, Black Blockers and their allies believe that, to be free and equal, all activists should collectively determine the form and content of their actions. The decision whether or not to resort to force during a demonstration must not be exempted from this principle of autonomy. Hence, different affinity groups

request of their superiors. Moreover, whenever it inflicts violence on a part of the sovereign people, the “democratic” liberal state exposes the gap between the legitimizing abstraction of represented sovereignty and the reality of a multitude exercising its autonomy in matters of political decision making and action.<sup>45</sup> “For the first time, power was not something over me. It was there, in front of me.”<sup>46</sup> These were the terms used by a French demonstrator to describe his involvement in a political riot. Black Bloc action is direct both because it is performed by the actors themselves rather than their “representatives,” and because the source of injustice—the state, capitalism, or globalization—is embodied in the police officer, the window of a McDonald’s, or a summit security fence, and as such it can be targeted directly.

For the demonstrators interviewed by Barette, “autonomous action and decision-making [is] the primary condition...where political or violent action is concerned.”<sup>47</sup> Yet a number of Black Blocs lack an internal structure for making collective decisions and coordinating actions. These Black Blocs, comprised of individuals who have spontaneously banded together and are impelled by that same spontaneity, may be subject to vacillation, tactical vulnerability, and disappointment.<sup>48</sup> However, although anyone wearing a black mask can join the black contingent at a demonstration, a Black Bloc is theoretically a convergence of several “affinity groups,”<sup>49</sup> a specific organizational form developed by the Spanish anarchist movement in the late nineteenth century, then revived in North America: first in the 1970s by the radical but nonviolent fringe of the pacifist antinuclear movement and later in the 1980s by ecologists, feminists, and AIDS activists (especially the organization Act Up!), before being adopted in the mid-1990s by the alter-globalization movement in the West. The affinity group is a unit created by a half-dozen to several dozen “amilitants” who are bonded by mutual trust and common feelings about the kinds of action they wish to take. The term “amilitant”<sup>50</sup> is used here to signify at once the importance of friendship (*ami* is the French word for friend) and the negation (indicated by the prefix a-) of the traditional figure of the militant, whose actions and identity were largely determined by organizational patriotism. Contemporary anti-authoritarian militants, including many members of affinity groups and Black Blocs, have no stake in traditional militancy, with its heavy emphasis on loyalty to the organization—party, union, and the like—and its penchant for authoritarian structures and hierarchies based on participation and political experience.<sup>51</sup>

Affinity groups provide the demonstrating multitude with the conscious means to coordinate its political actions while upholding the

privilege”—a position taken by those who have not been in a situation where they have needed to defend themselves against violence, be it economic, physical or otherwise.

“Violence,” “defense” and “fighting back,” are subjective and malleable terms. To some, chaining oneself to a door in a blockade of a bank is a violent act. What of taking a street in an unpermitted march? That’s criminal, too.

“I have no interest in being a ‘peaceful protester,’” says Angell. “We’re all criminals. People need to accept that.” But many within Occupy reject this notion, stating that they are standing up for their First Amendment rights—rights that, for example, do not allow for the blocking of public streets, of banks, of ports.

Hedges and others state that images of peaceful protesters attacked by police will be enough to win the war of public relations, to win hearts and minds. For Hedges, pepper spray is something to be savored. When things “get violent,” the onus is on occupiers to keep the peace; the moral authority lies with those engaging in political protest, those seeking change, as opposed to those maintaining the status quo. When the public sees that righteousness, this logic goes, they will be turned. Lay your bodies on the gears, protesters, be ground up and hope for the best. Hope for the cameras.

At this still-early stage in the movement, Occupy is a PR war. But to win that PR war, Occupy Oakland must rely on that information being consistently and accurately reported. The major networks and newspapers had few reporters out on January 28. Even the most spectacular planned events that capture media attention in this mid-sized, economically-depressed city are still reported in a way that mainly reflects the city’s accounts of events. The 24-hour vigil at City Hall Plaza, the foreclosure defenses, the squats of foreclosed buildings, the pop-up gardens and tongue-in-cheek homemade boats on Lake Merritt—none of these actions captured the camera’s gaze until the police came, until arrests were made.

The actions of black bloc occupiers in Portland this week have received far less coverage than the shields of Occupy Oakland. Smashy fits Oakland’s narrative of violence, not Portland’s.

“A riot is the language of the unheard,” said Martin Luther King. And Oakland is a city of the unheard, a city of tremendous institutionalized violence, a city of empty and blighted bank-owned homes, a city

that saw riots and mass arrests just a year ago in response to police brutality, all before Occupy has a name or public face.

Regardless of where that riotous energy is focused next, Hedges and others would be well served to spend some time in Oakland and its occupation in order to better cover it.

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from the use of force: a feeling of elation, a rather macho sensation of power, or the certainty of sharing in something politically pure and radical.<sup>41</sup> Within the Black Blocs themselves, there is a critique of those who view the use of force in demonstrations as synonymous with political and moral distinction. One female interviewee who has taken part in several Black Blocs stated, “There is prestige attached to being on the front lines, to being involved in a skirmish, to smashing windows. I think this is a shame, because there are lots of other people doing lots of other things that are just as important” [BB3]. Others deplore the fact that demonstrations in general and the use of force in particular are regarded by some as goals in themselves. A Black Bloc participant from Quebec felt it was a mistake to think “that a rally is the ultimate political thing, or that trashing necessarily makes you radical” [BB2], an opinion shared by another Black Bloc activist: “Dogmatic pacifism bothers me, but there’s also dogmatic violence, based on the view that violence is the only means of carrying on the struggle” [BB1].<sup>42</sup> In this connection, one long-time political activist who has participated in Black Blocs pointed out, “[A]ll the men and women I’ve known who have taken part in Black Blocs are militants and often veterans. They have in some sense been disillusioned because they came to the conclusion that peaceful methods are too limited and play into the hands of those in power. So they decided to resort to violence to stop being victims” [BB2].<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the Black Blocs’ deployment of militant force can be seen as a highly efficient media marketing strategy (as demonstrated by the media analyses discussed above). One Black Blocker put it in these terms:

As a protest tactic, the usefulness of destroying property is limited but significant. It gets newspaper reporters running to where it’s taking place and sends out the message that certain apparently unassailable companies aren’t really so unassailable after all. Those who take part in the protest and the others sitting at home in front of the TV can see how a small brick in the hands of a really determined person can break down a symbolic wall. Breaking a Nike window doesn’t place anybody’s life in jeopardy.<sup>44</sup>

### **Who Decides within Militant Groups?**

Another reason the violence of the Black Blocs is believed to be more legitimate than police or military violence is that it is carried out by egalitarian and autonomous individuals and groups, whereas employees of the state are only following orders, assaulting or killing at the

social 'morals.'"<sup>37</sup> This process of justification is corroborated by historians and sociologists, who have noted that when demonstrators resort to force, they are generally motivated by moral and political considerations bearing on the principles of liberty, equality, and justice.<sup>38</sup> For anarchists, the major economic summits are perfect symbols of the state's illegitimacy and violence, its fundamentally authoritarian and hierarchical nature, and its collusion with capital. One of my interviewees stated, "I've worked in bars, on construction sites, in factories, and each time I see that my interests are different from the boss's. So there's a real social war going on. It's always my friends and relations who suffer, always the same people who are victims on a daily basis, at work, etc." And to the question, "Why carry out direct actions against symbols of capitalism?" this was his answer: "Reasons? There are millions of them. Capitalism produces nothing but reasons to rise up against it. All capitalist production causes pain.... This world makes you puke, and the horrors you witness every day call for a response" [ADI].

On a tactical level, the Black Bloc may be used as an effective defense against police brutality. One activist who took part in the Black Bloc in Lausanne during the 2003 G8 Summit in Évian stated, "Being attacked by heavily armed riot police is terrifying. It has happened to me many times now and I think you never get over the fear. But I have come to feel more and more like fighting back and I have come to understand better the value of the Black Bloc."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the Black Bloc was originally conceived by activists of the German autonomous movement precisely because the police had no qualms about savagely attacking peaceful demonstrations. A similar line of thought was behind the deployment of the Black Bloc at the Battle of Seattle, which had been preceded by a series of nonviolent civil disobedience actions carried out in the 1990s by radical ecologists on the U.S. West Coast. Even though those demonstrators had offered no resistance, the police made systematic use of pepper spray and large-scale arrests. Seeking to forestall a repetition of this scenario, the militants who would form the Black Bloc at the Battle of Seattle decided to adopt a mobile tactic that would prevent both injuries resulting from pepper spray and massive arrests. As a result, neither injuries nor arrests occurred subsequent to the Black Bloc action, whereas the demonstrators engaging in civil disobedience around the convention center were met with volleys of pepper spray, tear gas, and rubber bullets, and arrested en masse.<sup>40</sup>

Yet like so many political actors, some Black Bloc participants deploy a hollow political and moral discourse to account for what they derive

## Concerning the Violent Peace-Police: An Open Letter to Chris Hedges

David Graeber

I am writing this on the premise that you are a well-meaning person who wishes Occupy Wall Street to succeed. I am also writing as someone who was deeply involved in the early stages of planning Occupy in New York.

I am also an anarchist who has participated in many Black Blocs. While I have never personally engaged in acts of property destruction, I have on more than one occasion taken part in Blocs where property damage has occurred. (I have taken part in even more Blocs that did not engage in such tactics. It is a common fallacy that this is what Black Blocs are all about. It isn't.)

I was hardly the only Black Bloc veteran who took part in planning the initial strategy for Occupy Wall Street. In fact, anarchists like myself were the real core of the group that came up with the idea of occupying Zuccotti Park, the "99%" slogan, the General Assembly process, and, in fact, who collectively decided that we would adopt a strategy of Gandhian non-violence and eschew acts of property damage. Many of us had taken part in Black Blocs. We just didn't feel that was an appropriate tactic for the situation we were in.

This is why I feel compelled to respond to your statement "The Cancer in Occupy." This statement is not only factually inaccurate, it is quite literally dangerous. This is the sort of misinformation that really can get people killed. In fact, it is far more likely to do so, in my estimation, than anything done by any black-clad teenager throwing rocks.

Let me just lay out a few initial facts:

1. Black Bloc is a tactic, not a group. It is a tactic where activists don masks and black clothing (originally leather jackets in Germany, later, hoodies in America), as a gesture of anonymity, solidarity, and to indicate to others that they are prepared, if the situation calls for it, for militant action. The very nature



of the tactic belies the accusation that they are trying to hijack a movement and endanger others. One of the ideas of having a Black Bloc is that everyone who comes to a protest should know where the people likely to engage in militant action are, and thus easily be able to avoid it if that's what they wish to do.

2. Black Blocs do not represent any specific ideological, or for that matter anti-ideological position. Black Blocs have tended in the past to be made up primarily of anarchists but most contain participants whose politics vary from Maoism to Social Democracy. They are not united by ideology, or lack of ideology, but merely a common feeling that creating a bloc of people with explicitly revolutionary politics and ready to confront the forces of the order through more militant tactics if required, is, on the particular occasion when they assemble, a useful thing to do. It follows one can no more speak of "Black Bloc Anarchists," as a group with an identifiable ideology, than one can speak of "Sign-Carrying Anarchists" or "Mic-Checking Anarchists."
3. Even if you must select a tiny, ultra-radical minority within the Black Bloc and pretend their views are representative of anyone who ever put on a hoodie, you could at least be up-to-date about it. It was back in 1999 that people used to pretend "the Black Bloc" was made up of nihilistic primitivist followers of John Zerzan opposed to all forms of organization. Nowadays, the preferred approach is to pretend "the Black Bloc" is made up of nihilistic insurrectionary followers of The Invisible Committee, opposed to all forms of organization. Both are absurd slurs. Yours is also 12 years out of date.
4. Your comment about Black Blocers hating the Zapatistas is one of the weirdest I've ever seen. Sure, if you dig around, you can find *someone* saying almost anything. But I'm guessing that, despite the ideological diversity, if you took a poll of participants in the average Black Bloc and asked what political movement in the world inspired them the most, the EZLN would get about 80% of the vote. In fact I'd be willing to wager that at least a third of participants in the average Black Bloc are wearing or carrying at least one item of Zapatista paraphernalia. (Have you ever actually *talked* to someone who has taken part in a Black Bloc? Or just to people who dislike them?)

ally engaged with the given issue. Without an emotional investment in politics, why give it any thought? Why get involved?<sup>30</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, Voltairine de Cleyre explained why she was an anarchist in these terms: "Mental activity alone, however, would not be sufficient.... The second reason, therefore, why I am an Anarchist, is because of the possession of a very large proportion of sentiment."<sup>31</sup> there does exist in politics a hybridization of reason and emotion (anger, sadness, fear, joy, love) that shapes the thinking and the will of activists fighting for a society consistent with their principles of freedom, equality, solidarity, and justice. Black Blockers and their allies repeatedly emphasize the distinction that must be drawn between the illegitimate and violent nature of the state and the nature of their actions. A Black Bloc participant from Quebec City explained, "I am nonviolent, a pacifist who dreams of a world without violence.... But the world I live in right now is violent and nonpacifist, so I believe it is legitimate for me to use force, to not let the state hold a monopoly on violence, and because pacifist civil disobedience merely creates a power relationship of victimization." His surprising conclusion was that, if "the state has no choice but to use violence, then the state leaves us no option but to also use violence against it. The state, by being what it is, created the Black Bloc" [BB2].<sup>32</sup> With reference to economic inequalities under capitalism, Barette shows that when Black Blockers and their allies loot a supermarket, as they did in Genoa in 2001, "for a brief moment an affluent society" exists, making it possible to experience sharing and the joy of communal solidarity.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, significantly, Black Blockers and their allies—with very few exceptions—do not see themselves as "revolutionaries."<sup>34</sup> As previously noted, theirs is a low-intensity, nonlethal violence whose aim is primarily symbolic and concerned with political communication. Indeed, sociologists have acknowledged that "rioters usually practiced much more self-restraint than is often admitted."<sup>35</sup> Resorting to force is identified as an "effective" means to express dissidence or criticism, disturb the public image of an official event deemed illegitimate, and exercise the traditional right and obligation to contest and resist illegitimate authority.<sup>36</sup> In sum, direct action lets a political actor signify here and now her or his critique of an immoral system. According to Barette, who also conducted interviews with participants in political riots, "all those surveyed asserted that their targets were chosen according to the symbolic weight that they attributed to them. Almost all of them insisted on a certain ethical aspect of their destruction, concerning the public image of riot as well as personal, political, and



2. The therapeutic position, which consists of engaging in individual or collective psychological interventions or spiritual development regimens.
3. The position of nonviolent civil disobedience, which involves the a priori dismissal of militant force as irrational and ineffective—as well as the infantilization of its supporters as “youths” or even “kids”<sup>24</sup>—thereby intending to delegitimize the movement, the implication being that nonviolence is rational and effective.

In addition to citing studies showing that activism boosts a person’s sense of well-being and decreases the effects of depression, Sullivan suggests that activists should demand “the right to be angry.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in semistructured interviews with anarchists where, under the heading of affectivity, I asked them if they had ever wept for political reasons, 23 out of 25 answered yes, thereby revealing a strong emotional engagement with politics. Several interviewees stated that they had shed tears of rage in the face of injustice (poverty, racism, police brutality, and the like). Taking militant action or, indeed, resorting to militant force is thus perceived by some as a legitimate way to express anger against an infuriating system. For one Black Blocker, “Black Bloc is about taking anger and directing it toward an enemy, a rational target.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in the opinion of an activist who took part in protests in Lausanne against the Évian G8 in 2003, “Capitalism kills.... It is right to respond to overwhelming injustice with anger.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, in comparing their previous militant experiences in Canada with their participation in a Black Bloc at demonstrations against the G8 in Germany in 2007, two members of the Calisse Brigade asked with regard to the relative coolness of North American activism, “what will it take to get angry and fight?”<sup>28</sup>

Militant thinking such as this clears the way for a political wisdom that does not restrict political activity to rationality, which is the theoretical outlook held by proponents of liberalism and many academics. Political action is in fact engendered by a will, which itself results from a rationale or an emotion or a blend of the two. Hence, reason and emotion are not mutually exclusive, since both can lead to a political will that in turn justifies political action. Indeed, the few sociologists and political scientists who have seriously examined the role of emotions in politics have observed that emotion and reason share in the construction of political thought and will.<sup>29</sup> According to political scientist George E. Marcus, for instance, citizens can be responsible and reasonable political actors only if they are emotion-

5. “Diversity of tactics” is not a “Black Bloc” idea. The original GA in Tompkins Square Park that planned the original occupation, if I remember, adopted the principle of diversity of tactics (at least it was discussed in a very approving fashion), at the same time as we all also concurred that a Gandhian approach would be the best way to go. This is not a contradiction: “diversity of tactics” means leaving such matters up to individual conscience, rather than imposing a code on anyone. Partly, this is because imposing such a code invariably backfires. In practice, it means some groups break off in indignation and do even more militant things than they would have otherwise, without coordinating with anyone else—as happened, for instance, in Seattle. The results are usually disastrous. After the fiasco of Seattle, of watching some activists actively turning others over to the police—we quickly decided we needed to ensure this never happened again. What we found that if we declared “we shall all be in solidarity with one another. We will not turn in fellow protesters to the police. We will treat you as brothers and sisters. But we expect you to do the same to us”—then, those who might be disposed to more militant tactics will act in solidarity as well, either by not engaging in militant actions at all for fear they will endanger others (as in many later Global Justice Actions, where Black Blocs merely helped protect the lockdowns, or in Zuccotti Park, where mostly people didn’t bloc up at all) or doing so in ways that run the least risk of endangering fellow activists.

\* \* \*

All this is secondary. Mainly I am writing as an appeal to conscience. Your conscience, since clearly you are a sincere and well-meaning person who wishes this movement to succeed. I beg you: Please consider what I am saying. Please bear in mind as I say this that I am not a crazy nihilist, but a reasonable person who is one (if just one) of the original authors of the Gandhian strategy OWS adopted—as well as a student of social movements, who has spent many years both participating in such movements, and trying to understand their history and dynamics.

I am appealing to you because I really do believe the kind of statement you made is profoundly dangerous.

The reason I say this is because, whatever your intentions, it is very hard to read your statement as anything but an appeal to violence.

After all, what are you basically saying about what you call “Black Bloc anarchists?”

- 1) they are not part of us
- 2) they are consciously malevolent in their intentions
- 3) they are violent
- 4) they cannot be reasoned with
- 5) they are all the same
- 6) they wish to destroy us
- 7) they are a cancer that must be excised

Surely you must recognize, when it’s laid out in this fashion, that this is precisely the sort of language and argument that, historically, has been invoked by those encouraging one group of people to physically attack, ethnically cleanse, or exterminate another—in fact, the sort of language and argument that is almost never invoked in any other circumstance. After all, if a group is made up exclusively of violent fanatics who cannot be reasoned with, intent on our destruction, what else can we really do? This is the language of violence in its purest form. Far more than “fuck the police.” To see this kind of language employed by someone who claims to be speaking in the name of non-violence is genuinely extraordinary. I recognize that you’ve managed to find certain peculiar fringe elements in anarchism saying some pretty extreme things, it’s not hard to do, especially since such people are much easier to find on the internet than in real life, but it would be difficult to come up with any “Black Bloc anarchist” making a statement as extreme as this.

Even if you did not intend this statement as a call to violence, which I suspect you did not, how can you honestly believe that many will not read it as such?

In my experience, when I point this sort of thing out, the first reaction I normally get from pacifists is along the lines of “what are you talking about? Of course I’m not in favor of attacking anyone! I am non-violent! I am merely calling for non-violently confronting such elements and excluding them from the group!” The problem is that in practice this is almost never what actually happens. Time after time, what it has actually meant in practice is either a) turning fellow activists over to the police, i.e., turning them over to people with weapons who will

tions. It bears repeating, however, that there is no uniform profile of the militants behind the black masks. A sociology student who is a fan of punk music may not participate in Black Blocs; conversely, a Black Bloc participant may dislike both punk music and college.

### **The Wisdom of the Use of Force**

More than anything else, it is the use of force by some Black Blocs that has given rise to the heated debate centered on them. Although anarchism as a political ideology or movement cannot intrinsically be reduced to violence—especially since many anarchists are dogmatically nonviolent—anarchist discourse abounds with calls to revolt against the police, the state, and capitalism, whether in analytical texts, pamphlets, songs, or graffiti. For example, the Anarchist Youth Network of Britain and Ireland declared in 2003, “We want to destroy government and rich people’s privileges.... Capitalism must be fought in the streets.”<sup>22</sup> In reality, anarchism remains a relatively weak social movement, which gave up the armed struggle long ago, and whose actions are immeasurably less violent than those of the state. It has been years since anarchists killed anyone in the course of their political struggle.

Nevertheless, the use of force during demonstrations—which has been limited to wrecking public or private property, tearing down security fences, and battling against the police—is embedded in the language of revolutionary, or at least insurrectional, combativeness and especially of intense anger against a nonegalitarian, unjust, murderous system. For Sian Sullivan, who was an observer-participant at demonstrations against the European Union in Thessalonica in June 2003, it is appropriate to situate the use of force and destruction of property by the Black Blocs and their allies in relation to this rage against an iniquitous and exploitative system that subjects the majority of the population to structural violence. Such an approach effectively neutralizes three critical, but collectively unsustainable and ultimately dead-end, positions with regard to the current political and economic system:

1. The position of social apathy and pathological passiveness, which can take the form of withdrawal from society and into individual experiences such as drugs, whether illicit or not. Sullivan moreover points to the considerable increase in depression and in the use of antidepressants in Western countries, noting at the same time that pharmaceutical companies have been at the vanguard of capitalist globalization.<sup>23</sup>

mainstream media cameras have avidly sought out spectacular images of Black Bloc actions at rallies of the Movement for Global Justice.<sup>18</sup> However, it was through the alternative media—for instance, Infoshop and Indymedia—that militants were able to familiarize themselves with Black Bloc organizational and operational methods, and to keep abreast of the tactical and strategic debates regarding this type of action. In their analysis of how Black Bloc actions have affected the visibility of anarchism in general on the Internet and in the mainstream media, Lynn Owens and L. Kendall Palmer<sup>19</sup> have identified a three-fold dynamic: (1) Beginning with Seattle, the mainstream media, while giving the Black Bloc a very high profile, showed it in a negative light, as the embodiment of an anarchism equivalent to chaos and violence. (2) The media attention generated a marked increase in the number of hits at anarchist Internet sites, including those (such as Infoshop) providing information or forums for discussion and debate on the Black Blocs. (3) The mainstream media subsequently showed more interest in other facets of anarchism such as anarchist soccer leagues and book fairs, while items on the Black Blocs sometimes included one or two texts (often based on anarchist Internet sites) explaining their motivations and political rationale or dealing with different topics.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Seattle, Black Blocs soon appeared in various parts of North America, Europe, Mexico, Turkey, and Brazil. The Black Bloc tactic seems to acquire specific meanings depending on the local cultural context. In Quebec, for example, it is in tune with the aesthetic and political vision of the punk movement, with the songs of bands like Bérurier Noir and films such as *La Haine*. In Mexico, the Black Bloc is especially attractive to the members of the anarcho-punk scene, in that its aesthetic coincides with those of both punk culture and the masked Zapatista rebels.<sup>20</sup> Yet in spite of such local particularities, and while they are neither homogeneous nor similar, the Black Blocs often include a majority of youths (though some members are over 50) and men (in many Black Blocs, women make up no more than 5 to 10 percent of the membership). Sociologist Geffery Pleyers identified both thrill-seeking youths with low levels of political awareness and highly politicized activists among Black Bloc participants.<sup>21</sup> This said, among those I interviewed, the majority worked on a regular basis in various community or political groups (opposed to neo-Nazis, racism, police brutality, and such); they noted, furthermore, that most members of the Black Blocs they had taken part in were also veteran activists. Moreover, many of the interviewees were or had been social science students, and some of their research dealt with the use of force in politics and in demonstra-

physically assault, shackle, and imprison them, or b) actual physical activist-on-activist assault. Such things *have* happened. There have been physical assaults by activists on other activists, and, to my knowledge, they have never been perpetrated by anyone in Black Bloc, but invariably by purported pacifists against those who dare to pull a hood over their heads or a bandana over their faces, or, simply, against anarchists who adopt tactics someone else thinks are going too far. (Not I should note even potentially violent tactics. During one 15-minute period in Occupy Austin, I was threatened first with arrest, then with assault, by fellow campers because I was expressing verbal solidarity with, and then standing in passive resistance beside, a small group of anarchists who were raising what was considered to be an unauthorized tent.)

This situation often produces extraordinary ironies. In Seattle, the only incidents of actual physical assault by protesters on other individuals were not attacks on the police, since these did not occur at all, but attacks by “pacifists” on Black Bloc’ers engaged in acts of property damage. Since the Black Bloc’ers had collectively agreed on a strict policy of non-violence (which they defined as never doing anything to harm another living being), they uniformly refused to strike back. In many recent occupations, self-appointed “Peace Police” have manhandled activists who showed up to marches in black clothing and hoodies, ripped their masks off, shoved and kicked them: always, without the victims themselves having engaged in any act of violence, always, with the victims refusing, on moral grounds, to shove or kick back.

The kind of rhetoric you are engaging in, if it disseminates widely, will ensure this kind of violence becomes much, much more severe.

\* \* \*

Perhaps you do not believe me, or do not believe these events to be particularly significant. If so, let me put the matter in a larger historical context.

If I understand your argument, it seems to come down to this:

1. OWS has been successful because it has followed a Gandhian strategy of showing how, even in the face of strictly non-violent opposition, the state will respond with illegal violence
2. Black Bloc elements who do not act according to principles of Gandhian non-violence are destroying the movement because

they provide retroactive justification for state repression, especially in the eyes of the media

3. Therefore, the Black Bloc elements must be somehow rooted out.

As one of the authors of the original Gandhian strategy, I can recall how well aware we were, when we framed this strategy, that we were taking an enormous risk. Gandhian strategies have not historically worked in the US; in fact, they haven't really worked on a mass scale since the civil rights movement. This is because the US media is simply constitutionally incapable of reporting acts of police repression as "violence." (One reason the civil rights movement was an exception is so many Americans at the time didn't view the Deep South as part of the same country.) Many of the young men and women who formed the famous Black Bloc in Seattle were in fact eco-activists who had been involved in tree-sits and forest defense lock-downs that operated on purely Gandhian principles—only to find that in the US of the 1990s, non-violent protesters could be brutalized, tortured (have pepper spray directly rubbed in their eyes), or even killed, without serious objection from the national media. So they turned to other tactics. We knew all this. We decided it was worth the risk.

However, we are also aware that when the repression begins, some will break ranks and respond with greater militancy. Even if this doesn't happen in a systematic and organized fashion, some violent acts will take place. You write that Black Bloc'ers smashed up a "locally owned coffee shop;" I doubted this when I read it, since most Black Blocs agree on a strict policy of not damaging owner-operated enterprises, and I now find in Susie Cagle's response to your article that, in fact, it was a chain coffee shop, and the property destruction was carried out by someone not in black. But still, you're right: A few such incidents will inevitably occur.

The question is how one responds.

If the police decide to attack a group of protesters, they will claim to have been provoked, and the media will repeat whatever the police say, no matter how implausible, as the basic initial facts of what happened. This will happen whether or not anyone at the protest does anything that can be remotely described as violence. Many police claims will be obviously ridiculous—as at the recent Oakland march where police accused participants of throwing "improvised explosive devices"—but no matter how many times the police lie about

participative political practice, without leaders or representatives, in which individual autonomy and collective autonomy were complementary and of equal importance.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to collective actions and practices, the *Autonomen* started hundreds of squats and were involved in a number of campaigns against nuclear power, war, and racism. On several occasions they engaged in street battles with racist neo-Nazi groups and with police forces protecting nuclear plants or attempting to drive squatters out of their dwelling places. The Black Bloc tactic was developed within this confrontational environment and then repeatedly taken up at rallies in Central Europe—for instance, in 1988 at a demonstration prefiguring those of the alter-globalization movement, on the occasion of a World Bank and IMF meeting in West Berlin.<sup>15</sup>

How did the Black Bloc tactic migrate from West Berlin in the 1980s to Seattle in 1999? Sociologists Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Dieter Rucht have shown that, for different periods and places, there exist repertoires of collective actions deemed effective and legitimate for the defense and promotion of a cause. Such repertoires are transformed and disseminated over time and across borders in accordance with the experiences of militants and changes in the political climate.<sup>16</sup> The Black Bloc tactic was disseminated mainly through the network of the punk and far-left or ultra-left counterculture via fanzines, touring music groups, and the personal contacts of travelling activists. In North America, the Black Bloc tactic is believed to have been used for the first time in January 1991 during a rally in Washington, D.C., denouncing the first war against Iraq. The World Bank building was targeted and windows were smashed. Anarchist journals such as *Love & Rage* then helped to make the Black Bloc tactic known throughout the American anarchist community.<sup>17</sup> The tactic was also taken up in the early 1990s by members of Anti-Racist Action (ARA), an anti-authoritarian, antiracist movement in the United States and Canada focussed on direct confrontation with neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

At the Battle of Seattle, most of the demonstrators who used force were not part of the Black Bloc. They were activists with nonviolent principles or Seattle residents reacting against the brutal police repression. But the privately owned or public media devoted particular attention to the Black Bloc militants, thereby contributing to the dissemination and popularity of their methods. Many of those who would adopt the Black Bloc tactic in the wake of Seattle first saw it in action thanks to the official media. Indeed, ever since Seattle,



This article is based to a large extent on over fifty interviews with anarchists, including a dozen individuals who used force during demonstrations (most of them in North America, some in France), on my first-hand observations as a participant in a number of demonstrations involving one or more Black Blocs<sup>10</sup> and in activist meetings,<sup>11</sup> and on an analysis of texts by and about the Black Blocs. My knowledge of demonstrations in Europe owes much to Clément Barette's excellent thesis, *La pratique de la violence politique par l'émeute: Le cas de la violence exercée lors des contre-sommets* (2002). I, like Barette, point out that Black Bloc activists usually make up only a minority of the casseurs (rioters) at demonstrations. But they are the most visible. And like Barette, I insist that readers remember that any generalization concerning the Black Blocs is a fallacy. The political riot in general and the Black Bloc contingents in particular are spaces occupied by a heterogeneous multitude. The goals of the participants, as well as their political histories, militant backgrounds, and socio-professional, cultural, and gender identities, can vary quite widely from one rally to the next.

### Origin, Dissemination, Adaptation

It was apparently the West Berlin police that coined the term "Black Bloc" (*schwarzer Block* in German) in reference to squatters who had gone into the streets in December 1980 dressed in black and equipped with helmets, shields, and a variety of clubs and projectiles to defend their dwellings in the face of eviction. The trial focused on a "criminal organization" known as "the Black Bloc;" the case collapsed.<sup>12</sup> Yet a call for the 1980 Mayday anarchist's mobilization in Frankfurt asked people to "Come out to the Black Block" (*schwarzer Block*).<sup>13</sup> The specific political history of the Black Blocs is thus directly rooted in the West German Autonomous movement (*Autonomen* in German) of the 1980s. This current was itself an extension of the Italian *Autonomia* movement of the 1960s and 70s, whose members were far-left working-class and youth activists critical of the official Communist Party. The *Autonomen* drew upon various ideological tendencies (Marxism, radical feminism, ecologism, anarchism), although ideological independence was upheld as a guarantee of freedom. In West Germany, the *Autonomen* were organized on egalitarian and libertarian bases and advocated autonomy on different levels: individual (politics practiced on one's own behalf and not through representation), gender (exclusively female feminist collectives), decisional (activist groups without higher authorities or hierarchies), and political (no ties with official institutions—the state, parties, nor unions). The *Autonomen* strived to carry out "here and now" an egalitarian and

such matters, the national media will still report their claims as true, and it will be up to protesters to provide evidence to the contrary. Sometimes, with the help of social media, we can demonstrate that particular police attacks were absolutely unjustified, as with the famous Tony Bologna pepper-spray incident. But we cannot by definition prove all police attacks were unjustified, even all attacks at one particular march; it's simply physically impossible to film every thing that happens from every possible angle all the time. Therefore we can expect that whatever we do, the media will dutifully report "protesters engaged in clashes with police" rather than "police attacked non-violent protesters." What's more, when someone does throw back a tear-gas canister, or toss a bottle, or even spray-paint something, we can assume that act will be employed as retroactive justification for whatever police violence occurred before the act took place.

All this will be true whether or not a Black Bloc is present.

If the moral question is, "is it defensible to threaten physical harm against those who do no direct harm to others," one might say the pragmatic, tactical question is, "even if it were somehow possible to create a Peace Police capable of preventing any act that could even be interpreted as 'violent' by the corporate media, by anyone at or near a protest, no matter what the provocation, would it have any meaningful effect?" That is, would it create a situation where the police would feel they couldn't use arbitrary force against non-violent protesters? The example of Zuccotti Park, where we achieved pretty consistent non-violence, suggests this is profoundly unlikely. And perhaps most importantly at all, even if it were somehow possible to create some kind of Peace Police that would prevent anyone under gas attack from so much as tossing a bottle, so that we could justly claim that no one had done anything to warrant the sort of attack that police have routinely brought, would the marginally better media coverage we would thus obtain really be worth the cost in freedom and democracy that would inevitably follow from creating such an internal police force to begin with?

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These are not hypothetical questions. Every major movement of mass non-violent civil disobedience has had to grapple with them in one form or another. How inclusive should you be with those who have different ideas about what tactics are appropriate? What do you do about those who go beyond what most people consider acceptable limits? What do you do when the government and its media allies



hold up their actions as justification—even retroactive justification—for violent and repressive acts?

Successful movements have understood that it's absolutely essential not to fall into the trap set out by the authorities and spend one's time condemning and attempting to police other activists. One makes one's own principles clear. One expresses what solidarity one can with others who share the same struggle, and if one cannot, tries one's best to ignore or avoid them, but above all, one keeps the focus on the *actual source of violence*, without doing or saying anything that might seem to justify that violence because of tactical disagreements you have with fellow activists.

I remember my surprise and amusement, the first time I met activists from the April 6 Youth Movement from Egypt, when the issue of non-violence came up. "Of course we were non-violent," said one of the original organizers, a young man of liberal politics who actually worked at a bank. "No one ever used firearms, or anything like that. We never did anything more militant than throwing rocks!"

Here was a man who understood what it takes to win a non-violent revolution! He knew that if the police start aiming tear-gas canisters directly at people's heads, beating them with truncheons, arresting and torturing people, and you have thousands of protesters, then some of them will fight back. There's no way to absolutely prevent this. The appropriate response is to keep reminding everyone of the violence of the state authorities, and never, ever, start writing long denunciations of fellow activists, claiming they are part of an insane fanatic malevolent cabal. (Even though I am quite sure that if a hypothetical Egyptian activist had wanted to make a case that, say, violent Salafis, or even Trotskyists, were trying to subvert the revolution, and adopted standards of evidence as broad as yours, looking around for inflammatory statements wherever they could find them and pretending they were typical of everyone who threw a rock, they could easily have made a case.) This is why most of us are aware that Mubarak's regime attacked non-violent protesters, and are not aware that many responded by throwing rocks.

Egyptian activists, in other words, understood what playing into the hands of the police *really* means.

Actually, why limit ourselves to Egypt? Since we are talking about Gandhian tactics here, why not consider the case of Gandhi himself? He had to deal with what to say about people who went much further

anti-authoritarian movement—whether consciously anarchist or not—that experienced a resurgence in 1970 with the rise of what sociologists have named the "New Social Movements" (feminists, environmentalists, youth, homosexuals), which wanted to break with party or trade union forms of militancy and to organize instead along horizontal, egalitarian, consensual lines.<sup>8</sup>

This heterogeneous current proposes to radicalize the democratic experience by promoting a deliberative decision-making process that is decentralized, egalitarian, and participative, and by rejecting any reference to the myth of political representation (of the "nation," the "proletariat," "civil society," or a social movement). It is an anti-authoritarian tendency repudiating all forms of authority, hierarchy, or power, even those that proliferate within theoretically egalitarian social movements, such as the Movement for Global Justice. Consensus is a political and moral goal, because it respects the independence and wishes of every person, unlike majority rule, which is imposed directly or through a representative, and which ultimately claims to express the general will at the expense of the silenced minority. The primacy of consensus goes hand in hand with freedom of association and decentralization; it implies the real possibility for militant associations freely established by consenting individuals to dissolve, reform, federate, or become autonomous.

To apprehend the Black Bloc phenomenon from the political perspective, this investigation will endeavor, first, to locate it against the historical background of its emergence and to identify the channels—already consistent with an anti-authoritarian logic—through which it spread over time and across borders. Second, the occasional use of force will be examined within the normative framework of the ethics of deliberation; thus, the analysis will bear mainly on the legitimacy of the decision-making process. It is worth pointing out that those involved in Black Blocs do not resort to force because they are anarchists. The fact is that all political and religious ideologies have articulated opportune justifications of the often lethal violence of *their* supporters, and that a good number of anarchists are *dogmatic* advocates of nonviolence, viewing even the slightest violence as *always* illegitimate.<sup>9</sup> References to specific events will help to clarify the emotions and political factors that lead a person to resort to force. At the same time, three political questions will be addressed: (1) Who should determine the means of action within a given group of activists? (2) Who should determine the means of actions in a demonstration? (3) Who should determine the criteria for judging the effectiveness of a social movement's actions and speak in its name?

some giant puppets from the police, who spend about thirty minutes destroying the puppets abandoned by the routed demonstrators on Seaside Plaza.<sup>6</sup>

• *New York, August–September 2004, Republican Party Convention*—Members of a Black Bloc march without masks among the crowd until they arrive at the Convention site. There they don their masks and a giant puppet representing a green dragon is set alight, signalling the start of a confrontation with the police.

• *Scotland, June 2005, G8 Summit (in Auchterarder)*—A Black Bloc undertakes a Suicide March, leaving the temporary autonomous and self-governed camp before dawn to draw the attention of the police away from the many affinity groups who have independently spread out in the countryside to block the highways at sunrise. The Suicide March finally reaches a highway and blocks it after repeatedly confronting a police barrage with clubs and stones.

• *Hillemm-Rostock, June 2007, G8 Summit*—A huge Black Bloc participates in the rallies against the G8 Summit in Germany and the next day attempts unsuccessfully to spark a riot in a gentrified neighborhood of East Berlin (an action called “Plan B”).

• *Strasbourg, April 2009, NATO Summit*—A Black Bloc is involved in skirmishes with police.

• *Vancouver, February 2010*—A small Black Bloc targets corporations sponsoring the Olympic Games.<sup>7</sup>

• *Toronto, June 2010, G20 Summit*—A Black Bloc 150 strong (including many women) targets tens of capitalist symbols (banks, McDonald’s, American Apparel, etc.), a strip club, and vehicles belonging to the media and the police.

Without claiming to exhaust the subject, the present discussion examines the Black Bloc as both political phenomenon and political actor, and investigates the hypothesis that a strong link exists between the type of collective direct action carried out by the Black Blocs and the desire of a great number of demonstrators and militants involved in the Movement for Global Justice, among others, to be politically active “in a different way.” Seen in this light, the Black Bloc emerges as an epiphenomenon within the Western tradition of a broad-based

than rock-throwing (even though Egyptians throwing rocks at police were already going much further than any US Black Bloc has). Gandhi was part of a very broad anti-colonial movement that included elements that actually were using firearms, in fact, elements engaged in outright terrorism. He first began to frame his own strategy of mass non-violent civil resistance in response to a debate over the act of an Indian nationalist who walked into the office of a British official and shot him five times in the face, killing him instantly. Gandhi made it clear that while he was opposed to murder under any circumstances, he also refused to denounce the murderer. This was a man who was trying to do the right thing, to act against an historical injustice, but did it in the wrong way because he was “drunk with a mad idea.”

Over the course of the next 40 years, Gandhi and his movement were regularly denounced in the media, just as non-violent anarchists are also always denounced in the media (and I might remark here that while not an anarchist himself, Gandhi was strongly influenced by anarchists like Kropotkin and Tolstoy), as a mere front for more violent, terroristic elements, with whom he was said to be secretly collaborating. He was regularly challenged to prove his non-violent credentials by assisting the authorities in suppressing such elements. Here Gandhi remained resolute. It is always morally superior, he insisted, to oppose injustice through non-violent means than through violent means. However, to oppose injustice through violent means is still morally superior to not doing anything to oppose injustice at all.

And Gandhi was talking about people who were blowing up trains, or assassinating government officials. Not damaging windows or spray-painting rude things about the police.

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porters asking them what they were doing, some activists tell them, “You wrote that we would trash the town, we decided to pick up the trash!”<sup>5</sup>

• *Quebec City, April 2001, Summit of the Americas*—Several small Black Blocs harass the security perimeter and the police officers assigned to it, while at the same time protecting other demonstrators against police attacks.

• *Gothenburg, May 2001, Summit of the European Union*—A Black Bloc confronts the police, who fire real bullets at the crowd.

• *Genoa, June 2001, G8 Summit*—The Black Blocs and their allies strike symbols of capitalism, attack a prison, and retaliate against police officers who assaulted them. A police agent kills a demonstrator with two gunshots to the head.

• *Calgary, June 2002, G8 Summit (at Kananaskis)*—A Black Bloc of several dozen people engages in a peaceful march.

• *Prague, 21 November 2002, NATO Summit*—Sensing a provocation, a Black Bloc maneuvers to protect a police vehicle slowly making its way through a rally of some three thousand anarcho-communists.

• *Geneva/Annemasse, May 2003, G8 Summit (in Évian)*—A Black Bloc of about one hundred takes independent action in Geneva, suddenly appearing late in the evening in Geneva’s downtown shopping area when everything is quiet, hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at the shop windows, only to vanish a few minutes later. Over the following days, Black Blocs together with other groups of demonstrators engage in street-blocking actions, preventing access to Summit meeting places.

• *Thessalonica, June 2003, Summit of the European Union*—Black Blocs participate in street-blocking actions and battle police officers defending the Summit. The next day they demonstrate in the city along with tens of thousands of people, and attack capitalist symbols: they set fire to a McDonald’s and Vodafone store and wreck some thirty other establishments, including three banks.

• *Miami, November 2003, Summit of the Americas*—The Black Bloc takes part in the rally, endeavoring in vain to protect

the case during the demonstrations against the April 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. The primary objective of a Black Bloc is to signal the presence within a demonstration of a radical critique of the economic and political system. To help convey their message, the Black Blocs usually display banners bearing anticapitalist and anti-authoritarian slogans, and flags—black or red and black, the anarchist colors, and occasionally red, suggesting that some Black Blockers consider themselves more communist than anarchist. The Black Blocs sometimes resort to force to express their radical critique, which has made them the subject of heated polemics. Politicians, the police, the spokespeople of mainstream reformist organizations within the social movement, and even journalists and some academics<sup>2</sup> are united in condemning these demonstrators and their use of force.

Severino, from the Bostonian Barricada Collective of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC), wrote an article (circa late 2001) entitled “Has the Black Bloc Tactic Reached the End of Its Usefulness?”<sup>3</sup> and in 2003, some anarchists declared “the Black Bloc is dead”<sup>4</sup> to indicate that this method was no longer suited to the political environment and to the power relations prevailing in the aftermath of the Battle of Genoa in June 2001 (where an Italian police officer killed a demonstrator at point blank range) and of the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 (which provided grounds for higher levels of repression). The evasion tactic adopted by the elites, whereby summits are held in places inaccessible to demonstrators, has blurred the significance of direct actions and made it more difficult to mobilize activists. This said, however, Black Blocs still appear at rallies on a regular basis. Here, for example, are some events at which the Black Bloc tactic was applied:

• *Seattle, 30 November 1999, Summit of the WTO*—Far from the demonstrations, a Black Bloc about 250 strong targets capitalist symbols in the city’s shopping district.

• *Washington, D.C., 16 April 2000, Meeting of the IMF and the World Bank*—The Black Bloc directs its efforts toward protecting nonviolent demonstrations against police assaults.

• *Prague, September 2000, Meeting of the IMF and the World Bank*—A Black Bloc armed with clubs, rocks, and Molotov cocktails confronts a police barrage in a vain attempt to force its way through to the convention center.

• *Buffalo, Spring 2001*—A Black Bloc enters a poor neighborhood to collect the garbage. Responding to bewildered re-

## Interview with Chris Hedges about Black Bloc

J.A. Myerson

Chris Hedges’ syndicated Truthdig column “Black Bloc: The Cancer in Occupy,” printed Tuesday at Truthout and elsewhere, created quite a stir among members of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Some endorsed the sentiment. Among others, including some central organizers who helped plan the action over the summer, the column raised eyebrows and hackles. I compiled what I considered to be the best critiques of the piece that I came across (as well as my own questions) and interviewed Hedges over the phone.

I explained at the outset that I, too, had written in Truthout to urge doctrinal nonviolence and that I am enormously fond of Hedges’ prodigious body of work. Nevertheless, I explained, there was a lot about the column that confounded me and many people I’d heard from, and I asked him to let me push for clarification on a number of points. Here is the transcript of that recorded interview, edited very minimally for clarity.

A previous column of yours entitled “The Greeks Get It” insinuated that the riots there were productive and, as you know, they committed vandalism and arson and so did protesters everywhere from Iceland to Romania, where the prime minister just resigned. I wonder if the arsonists and vandals in those movements were cancerous to you as well.

Yes.

Then I wonder if you would explain your writing, “Here’s to the Greeks. They know what to do when corporations pillage and loot their country.... Riot. Shut down the city centers. Toss the bastards out.... The Greeks, unlike most of us, get it.”

The article and the column lauded the Greeks for responding. It was not an article about tactics. You use the word “insinuate.” That’s cor-

rect. You would have to insinuate that I supported rioting, but I don't know how you can in the long history of everything that I've written. The point that I was trying to make in that article was that the Greeks had gotten out on the street and risen up. I didn't agree with everything they'd done out on the street, but I was confounded by the passivity on the part of the American public that was being fleeced and abused in a manner not dissimilar to what was happening in Greece. I never in that article approve rioting. I had to put it in there, because it's what they did, but the point of the article was that the Greeks had responded and we hadn't—what's wrong with us?

**You speak of the black bloc as though it were a political organization with membership, a violent, secretive, nihilistic cabal, which calls to mind the Black Hand, conveniently. It sounds like a really snarky question, but I swear I am genuinely interested in your answer: were you aware writing this piece that that is not an apt description of a black bloc, which is no organization at all, but a protest tactic that does more than just smash and burn?**

I put in there that they detest organization of any kind. I use part of their jargon—"feral" and "spontaneous" protest—whereby you walk down a street and nothing is planned. You walk by a window and you break it. They feel that any kind of attempt to plan immediately imposes a kind of hierarchy that they oppose. That's in the piece. There's a limit to expounding upon the internal—I didn't get into primitive anarchism and all this kind of stuff. But that was certainly part of the piece. It's precisely because they detest—there's a line in the article that says that they are opposed to those of us on the organized left. The operative word is "organization."

**I have seen black blocs de-arresting their comrades (stealing people back from police custody), without hurting anyone or anything. I have seen them win a tug of war with the police and confiscate their kettle netting. I have seen them returning tear gas canisters from whence they came in order to mitigate the suffering of children and elderly protesters in their midst.**

Let's not paint these people as the Boy Scouts, come on.

**Obviously, there is smashing and burning, but I wonder if tactics like those, which are also part and parcel of black bloc protests, are also cancerous.**

## **The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, & Deliberative Practices**

Francis Dupuis-Déri

Similar to love, a riot can sometimes take us by surprise, when we think we are not prepared, but that if one has an open disposition toward love, like riots, it will allow one to seize the opportunities, and the situations. It would be in vain to say that we can prepare a riot, though we can at least prepare for riots: do what it takes to help ignite the fire.

—*Two companer@s from the Calisse Brigade, "A. Anti. Anti-Capitalista!" (10 June 2007)*

**A** considerable portion of the activities of the Movement for Global Justice in the West involves contesting the legitimacy of the major summits of the international bodies associated with the globalization of capitalism, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the G8, and the European Union. On such occasions, various coalitions organize rallies, street carnivals, public debates, film screenings, music shows, as well as disruptive actions, with the whole series of events possibly lasting a number of days. This was the backdrop against which the Black Bloc made its spectacular entrance into the Movement for Global Justice at the "Battle of Seattle" on 30 November 1999, smashing the windows of McDonald's, Nike, Gap, and certain banks. The Black Bloc is an easily identifiable collective action carried out by individuals wearing black clothes and masks and forming a contingent—a black block—within a rally. For its many detractors and small number of supporters, the Black Bloc represents the renewal of anarchism on the political scene in general and among anticapitalist forces in particular.<sup>1</sup>

There is no such thing as the Black Bloc; there are, rather, Black Blocs, each of them arising on the occasion of a rally and dissolving when the rally is over. The size of the Black Blocs can vary from a few dozen to a few thousand individuals. In some circumstances, several Black Blocs are active simultaneously within a single protest event, as was



facing outrage and recriminations, humbly emphasizing our own criteria for what is legitimate.

Whether we think this challenge is worthwhile depends on our long-term goals. As David Graeber has pointed out, conflicts over goals often masquerade as moral and strategic differences. Making nonviolence the central tenet of our movement makes good sense if our long-term goal is not to challenge the fundamental structure of our society, but to build a mass movement that can wield legitimacy as defined by the powerful—and that is prepared to *police* itself accordingly. But if we really want to transform our society, we have to transform the discourse of legitimacy, not just position ourselves well within it as it currently exists. If we focus only on the latter, we will find that terrain slipping constantly from beneath our feet, and that many of those with whom we need to find common cause can never share it with us.

It's important to have strategic debates: shifting away from the discourse of nonviolence doesn't mean we have to endorse every single broken window as *a good idea*. But it only obstructs these debates when dogmatists insist that all who do not share their goals and assumptions—not to say their class interests!—have no strategic sense. It's also not strategic to focus on delegitimizing each other's efforts rather than coordinating to act together where we overlap. That's the point of affirming a diversity of tactics: to build a movement that has space for all of us, yet leaves no space for domination and silencing—a “people power” that can both expand and intensify.

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First of all, let's be clear. I don't have a problem with anarchism. The problem is they're not tactics I would engage in. I wouldn't classify them as “violent.” I would classify violence as the destruction of property and vandalism, the shouting of insulting messages to the police, physical confrontations with the police. Those are very clear cut acts of violence. The issues that you raise are more nebulous and circumstantial. Throwing a tear-gas canister back that's been fired at you I would not classify as a violent act and yet it was something that probably would not have been done during the civil rights movement under King.

**I think he might have thought of that as violent.**

I don't know that he would have thought of it as violent. He wouldn't resist arrest. I know that's an issue. When I've been arrested, I don't resist arrest. Many people do resist arrest. King never did resist arrest. But I prefaced it by saying that it's not something I would do. On the other hand, those are more nebulous issues, which may be part of black bloc activity, but let's be careful. Black bloc activity includes other things that are clearly defined as acts of violence. They don't limit it to those activities is what I'm saying.

**Did you speak to people who had participated in a black bloc in the compilation of this column?**

No.

**I've got some assertions you make in the column and I want to ask you about them. Let's start with the one you mentioned. “Black Bloc adherents detest those of us on the organized left and seek, quite consciously, to take away our tools of empowerment.” How did you arrive at that conclusion?**

Because of the tactics that they embrace. Smashing the window of a coffee shop—which happened in November in Oakland to a local coffee shop owner and then the coffee shop was looted—is an activity that is destructive to OWS, in my view.

**And it necessarily entailed detesting the organized left and consciously seeking to take away the tools of empowerment?**

If you look at the writings of black bloc ideologues, they're very clear. I did listen to several hours of Anarchy Radio before I wrote this,

which is out of Eugene. None of that made it into the piece, but I was curious to hear them and hear them on the Zapatistas.

**I'm interested in that, because the excerpts I have written out are instances of you describing black blocs and their attitudes and their ideology.**

This is the radio program that's run by John Zerzan. They're all archived online, plus his publications are online, so I read a lot of the publications and quoted from some of the publications and I listened to probably four or five hours of the radio broadcasts. Like I listened to them on Noam Chomsky. I was curious as to what their attitudes were on a variety of issues.

**I'm struggling with the seemingly conflicting proposals that they are opposed to organization, have no organization and hate organization and, yet, monolithically ascribe to any ideology at all.**

I didn't say that they subscribe to an ideology. I said that they subscribe to tactics. I don't know how much you know about them, but it's the whole anti-civilization movement. That's another discussion. But there is a hostility towards civilization as it's currently configured and it must be taken down. Their problem with those of us on the organized left is that we, in essence, are attempting to reform it rather than destroy it. And that's their attack on Chomsky. Zerzan calls him a sell-out. They hate Derrick Jensen, which is why I called him. They've really gone after Derrick.

**Here's another excerpt. "These acts, the movement argues, can never be organized. Organization, in the thinking of the movement, implies hierarchy, which must always be opposed. There can be no restraints on 'feral' or 'spontaneous' acts of insurrection. Whoever gets hurt gets hurt. Whatever gets destroyed gets destroyed." Where does "the movement" argue this?**

When they talk about the tactics. That's what "feral" activity is. It rises out of the moment. That's what they embrace. You don't walk down the street and say, "We're going to target that shop." It's a spontaneous response.

**That's interesting taken in the context of this quotation. "The Black Bloc movement bears the rigidity and dogmatism of all absolutism sects. Its adherents alone possess the truth. They alone understand. They alone arrogate the right, because they are en-**

This is not an easy matter. Even when we passionately believe in what we are doing, if it is not widely recognized as legitimate we tend to sputter when asked to explain ourselves. If only we could stay within the bounds prescribed for us within this system while we go about overthrowing it! The Occupy movement was characterized by attempts to do just that—citizens insisting on their right to occupy public parks on the basis of obscure legal loopholes, making tortuous justifications no more convincing to onlookers than to the authorities. People want to redress the injustices around them, but in a highly regulated and controlled society, there's so little they feel entitled to do.

Solnit may be right that the emphasis on nonviolence was essential to the initial success of Occupy Wall Street: people want some assurance that they're not going to have to leave their comfort zones, and that what they're doing will make sense to everyone else. But it often happens that the preconditions for a movement become limitations that it must transcend: Occupy Oakland remained vibrant after other occupations died down *because* it embraced a diversity of tactics, not *despite* this. Likewise, if we really want to transform our society, we can't remain forever within the narrow boundaries of what the authorities deem legitimate: we have to extend the range of what people feel entitled to do.



*All the media coverage in the world won't help us if we fail to create a situation in which people feel entitled to defend themselves and each other.*

Legitimizing resistance, expanding what is acceptable, is not going to be popular at first—it never is, precisely because of the tautology set forth above. It takes consistent effort to shift the discourse: calmly

The responsibility for this tragedy rests not only on the rebels themselves, nor on those who imposed the injustices from which they suffered, but also upon the activists who stigmatized them rather than joining in creating a movement that could channel their anger. If there is no connection between those who intend to transform society and those who suffer most within it, no common cause between the hopeful and the enraged, then when the latter rebel, the former will disown them, and the latter will be crushed along with all hope of real change. No effort to do away with hierarchy can succeed while excluding the disenfranchised, the Others.

What should be our basis for legitimacy, then, if not our commitment to legality, nonviolence, or any other standard that hangs our potential comrades out to dry? How do we explain what we're doing and why we're entitled to do it? We have to mint and circulate a currency of legitimacy that is not controlled by our rulers, that doesn't create Others.

As anarchists, we hold that our desires and well-being and those of our fellow creatures are the only meaningful basis for action. Rather than classifying actions as violent or nonviolent, we focus on whether they extend or curtail freedom. Rather than insisting that we are nonviolent, we emphasize the necessity of interrupting the violence inherent in top-down rule. This might be inconvenient for those accustomed to seeking dialogue with the powerful, but it is unavoidable for everyone who truly wishes to abolish their power.

### **Conclusion: Back to Strategy**

But *how* do we interrupt the violence of top-down rule? The partisans of nonviolence frame their argument in strategic as well as moral terms: violence alienates the masses, preventing us from building the "people power" we need to triumph.

There is a kernel of truth at the heart of this. If violence is understood as *illegitimate use of force*, their argument can be summarized as a tautology: *delegitimized action is unpopular*.

Indeed, those who take the legitimacy of capitalist society for granted are liable to see anyone who takes material steps to counteract its disparities as violent. The challenge facing us, then, is to legitimize concrete forms of resistance: not on the grounds that they are nonviolent, but on the grounds that they are liberating, that they fulfill real needs and desires.

**lightened and we are not, to dismiss and ignore competing points of view as infantile and irrelevant. They hear only their own voices. They heed only their own thoughts. They believe only their own clichés. And this makes them not only deeply intolerant but stupid." How did you arrive at the conclusions that they're rigidly dogmatic and dismissive of all other points of view?**

From listening to anarchist radio and reading anarchist web sites.

**You cite an article by someone named "Venomous Butterfly," which criticizes the Zapatistas on anarchist grounds, in a magazine called *Green Anarchy*, whose publisher, John Zerzan, you describe as "one of the principal ideologues of the Black Bloc movement in the United States." Seemingly on these grounds alone, you contend that "Black Bloc adherents" "argue" that the "real enemies" include "populist movements such as the Zapatistas." I can personally confirm that many Black bloc anarchists support the Zapatistas and I'm left wondering about the wisdom of thinking one article in one magazine that no one has endorsed as representative indicates much. An equivalent would be if someone attributed Alexander Cockburn's views on the climate crisis to Katrina van den Heuvel, furthermore adding that van den Heuvel is one of the principal ideologues of the Occupy movement and that therefore Cockburn's views on the climate crisis are broadly applicable to the Occupy movement. Did you have better grounds for this assertion than I've detected?**

I certainly, first of all, don't consider myself an expert on the black bloc. I am certain that there are, as with any group, varieties of opinions and divisions. I think it is pretty uniform that they are dismissive of the organized left and I see it as a value judgment. I think that their tactics are ones that essentially are destructive to the tools of empowerment of the organized left. The vandalism that they carry out and the cynicism that they express are juvenile. I am sure that there are black blocs who support the Zapatistas, but they are by and large hostile to any organized entities on the left, including unions, including environmental activists, including populist movements. If you look at the sentence, it says "populist movements such as the Zapatistas." I just pulled it out as an example. Zerzan is hostile to the Zapatistas. I'm sure that others are not. But I used it as an example of a movement that has been attacked by black bloc proponents.

**You write, "The Occupy encampments in various cities were shut down precisely because they were nonviolent." I think I get the**

**point, but I wonder if you'd game that out, because it seems to insinuate that, had camps been violent, they would not have been shut down.**

That's a pretty broad leap. They were shut down because they articulated the concerns and anger and frustrations of the mainstream. This is a mainstream movement. Any time you went to Zuccotti Park on a Saturday, it was filled with strollers from mothers and fathers from New Jersey. And the movement spread and resonated. There has been an extremely concerted effort to destroy it, first by physically removing their centers of operation and now attempting to create internal divisions within the movement, using black bloc activity to discredit the movement, attempting to set up front organizations like Van Jones to channel the energy back into the Democratic Party and electoral politics. I think these movements really terrify the power elite and, in particular, the Democrats. One could argue that the greatest enemy of the Occupy movement is Barack Obama. I don't want to see the movement destroyed. We cannot underestimate, in this security and surveillance state, the extent to which there are internal forces within this movement seeking to rip it apart. The black bloc is a gift to their hands.

**What then is the solution to the problem? What is the prognosis for the cancer?**

There has to be a rigid adherence to nonviolence. That does not mean that the black bloc can't exist. We saw a multiplicity of groups in the 1960s—from the Yippies to the Panthers to the Weather Underground—but the movement itself has to continue to operate in a way that it does not alienate the mainstream. If the security and surveillance state is able to alienate the mainstream from OWS, then OWS will be far more vulnerable to being destroyed. That's very similar to the civil rights movement. I'm a huge admirer of Malcolm X. And, yet, the establishment didn't really fear Malcolm X; they feared King. That's true here. They fear OWS. They don't fear the black bloc.

**That sentiment I agree with completely. But it's interesting to track the basis for your compunction in the piece. That expression seems sort of practical-strategic-pragmatic in a way that I really agree with, but you weren't quoting Gene Sharp, you were quoting *All Quiet on the Western Front* so it seems like part of your objection to black bloc tactics is less strategic-tactical than almost spiritual.**

not targeting communities of color, we're protecting them from criminal activity.' Yet we prepared the way for this ourselves by affirming language that makes legitimacy conditional.

When we emphasize that our movements are and must be nonviolent, we're doing the same thing. This creates an Other that is outside the protection of whatever legitimacy we win for ourselves—that is, in short, a legitimate target for violence. Anyone who pulls their comrades free from the police rather than waiting passively to be arrested—anyone who makes shields to protect themselves from rubber bullets rather than abandoning the streets to the police—anyone who is charged with assault on an officer for being assaulted by one: all these unfortunates are thrown to the wolves as the *violent* ones, the bad apples. Those who must wear masks even in legal actions because of their precarious employment or immigration status are denounced as *cancer*, betrayed in return for a few crumbs of legitimacy from the powers that be. We Good Citizens can afford to be perfectly transparent; we would never commit a crime or harbor a potential criminal in our midst.

And the Othering of violence smooths the way for *the violence of Othering*. The ones who bear the worst consequences of this are not the middle class brats pilloried in internet flame wars, but the same people on the wrong side of every other dividing line in capitalism: the poor, the marginalized, those who have no credentials, no institutions to stand up for them, no incentive to play the political games that are slanted in favor of the authorities and perhaps also a few jet-setting activists.

Simply delegitimizing violence can't put an end to it. The disparities of this society couldn't be maintained without it, and the desperate will always respond by acting out, especially when they sense that they've been abandoned to their fate. But this kind of delegitimization *can* create a gulf between the angry and the morally upright, the "irrational" and the rational, the *violent* and the *social*. We saw the consequences of this in the UK riots of August 2011, when many of the disenfranchised, despairing of bettering themselves through any legitimate means, hazarded a private war against property, the police, and the rest of society. Some of them had attempted to participate in previous popular movements, only to be stigmatized as hooligans; not surprisingly, their rebellion took an antisocial turn, resulting in five deaths and further alienating them from other sectors of the population.



If we are to survive, that means

learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish...learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

It is particularly shameful that Solnit would quote Lorde's argument against silencing out of context in order to delegitimize and divide. But perhaps we should not be surprised when successful professionals sell out anonymous poor people: they have to defend their class interests, or else risk joining us. For the mechanisms that raise people to positions of influence within activist hierarchies and liberal media are not neutral, either; they reward docility, often coded as "nonviolence," rendering invisible those whose efforts actually threaten capitalism and hierarchy.

### The Lure of Legitimacy

When we want to be taken seriously, it's tempting to claim legitimacy any way we can. But if we don't want to reinforce the hierarchies of our society, we should be careful not to validate forms of legitimacy that perpetuate them.

It is easy to recognize how this works in some situations: when we evaluate people on the basis of their academic credentials, for example, this prioritizes abstract knowledge over lived experience, centralizing those who can get a fair shot in academia and marginalizing everyone else. In other cases, this occurs more subtly. We emphasize our status as community organizers, implying that those who lack the time or resources for such pursuits are less entitled to speak. We claim credibility as longtime locals, implicitly delegitimizing all who are not—including immigrants who have been forced to move to our neighborhoods because their communities have been wrecked by processes originating in ours. We justify our struggles on the basis of our roles within capitalist society—as students, workers, taxpayers, citizens—not realizing how much harder this can make it for the unemployed, homeless, and excluded to justify theirs.

We're often surprised by the resulting blowback. Politicians discredit our comrades with the very vocabulary we popularized: "Those aren't activists, they're homeless people pretending to be activists." "We're

It's both. I've spent my life around mobs and groups and crowds and armies and they foster for me very frightening physical and emotional responses.

**Thank you for taking the time to answer combative questions.**

I don't mind combative questions. But a lot of it was tenuous conjecture. The idea that because I mentioned the word "riot" in the piece about the Greeks, that I embrace rioting.

**It's actually a thing that confuses me personally and I'm looking for your advice on it. I am myself a big nonviolent advocate. But Iceland, Italy, Tunisia, Egypt, Chile, Romania—all over the place....**

That's a longer discussion. Eight hundred people were killed in Egypt. It's a different discussion. When we get to those levels, let's talk.

**Will you expand on that? Are you saying that once there's a big, widespread revolutionary movement, then there's room for that kind of thing?**

I'm not going to go there. Personally, I'm always nonviolent. But once that kind of repression manifests itself, it inevitably provokes counterviolence. I wrote a whole book on this called *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. Violence is a poison and even when it's employed in a just cause, it's still a poison. This is something I intimately understand. I'm not a pacifist. You can push people to a point where they have no option but to employ violence. That's certainly what happened to the people in Sarajevo, but once you do, it's always tragic. I don't want to go there. That's why I've been such a fervent supporter of OWS, because I don't want us to descend into that.

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As anyone can readily ascertain, the majority of “Dear Occupiers” simply reviews the systemic problems with capitalism; the advocacy of diversity of tactics is limited to a couple subdued paragraphs. Why would an award-winning author represent this as a pro-violence screed?

Perhaps for the same reason that she joins the authorities in delegitimizing violence even when this equips them to delegitimize her own efforts: Solnit’s leverage in social movements and her privileges in capitalist society are both staked on the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate. If social movements ever cease to be managed from the top down—if they stop *policing themselves*—the Hedges and Solnits of the world will be out of a job literally as well as figuratively. That would explain why they perceive their worst enemies to be those who soberly advise against dividing movements into legitimate and illegitimate factions.

It’s hard to imagine Solnit would have represented “Dear Occupiers” the way she did if she expected her audience to read it. Given her readership, this is a fairly safe bet—Solnit is often published in the corporate media, while CrimethInc. literature is distributed only through grass-roots networks; in any case, she didn’t include a link. Chris Hedges took similar liberties in his notorious “The Cancer in Occupy,” a litany of outrageous generalizations about “black bloc anarchists.” It seems that both authors’ ultimate goal is silencing: *Why would you want to hear what those people have to say? They’re violent thugs.*

The title of Solnit’s article is a reference to Audre Lorde’s influential text, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” Lorde’s text was not an endorsement of nonviolence; even Derrick Jensen, whom Hedges quotes approvingly, has debunked such misuse of this quotation. Here, let it suffice to repeat that the most powerful of the master’s tools is not violence, but delegitimization and division—as Lorde emphasized in her text. To defend our movements against these, Lorde exhorted us:

Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark... Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.

The individuals who linked arms and actively resisted, that in itself is an act of violence.... Linking arms in a human chain when ordered to step aside is not a nonviolent protest.

—University of California police captain Margo Bennett, quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle, justifying the use of force against students at the University of California at Berkeley

### **The Master's Tools: Delegitimization, Misrepresentation, and Division**

Violent repression is only one side of the two-pronged strategy by which social movements are suppressed. For this repression to succeed, movements must be divided into *legitimate* and *illegitimate*, and the former convinced to disown the latter—usually in return for privileges or concessions. We can see this process up close in the efforts of professional journalists like Chris Hedges and Rebecca Solnit to demonize rivals in the Occupy movement.

In last year's "Throwing Out the Master's Tools and Building a Better House: Thoughts on the Importance of Nonviolence in the Occupy Revolution," Rebecca Solnit mixed together moral and strategic arguments against "violence," hedging her bets with a sort of US exceptionalism: Zapatistas can carry guns and Egyptian rebels set buildings on fire, but let no one so much as burn a trash can in the US. At base, her argument was that only "people power" can achieve revolutionary social change—and that "people power" is necessarily nonviolent.

Solnit should know that the defining of violence isn't neutral: in her article "The Myth of Seattle Violence," she recounted her unsuccessful struggle to get the *New York Times* to stop representing the demonstrations against the 1999 WTO summit in Seattle as "violent." In consistently emphasizing violence as her central category, Solnit is reinforcing the effectiveness of one of the tools that will inevitably be used against protesters—including her—whenever it serves the interests of the powerful.

Solnit reserves particular ire for those who endorse diversity of tactics as a way to preclude the aforementioned dividing of movements. Several paragraphs of "Throwing Out the Master's Tools" were devoted to denouncing the CrimethInc. "Dear Occupiers" pamphlet: Solnit proclaimed it "a screed in justification of violence," "empty machismo peppered with insults," and stooped to ad hominem attacks on authors about whom she admittedly knew nothing.

## **The Surgeons of Occupy**

Peter Gelderloos

In his February 6 article entitled, "The Cancer of Occupy," Chris Hedges attempts to analyze the political beliefs and practices of the black bloc, a group he characterizes as the scourge of the Occupy movement. Although Mr. Hedges evidently conducted at least a little to research his article, he does not quote a single proponent or participant of a black bloc, neither within the Occupy movement nor from any of the many other black blocs that have been organized in the United States. Such research would not have been difficult. There are a plethora of anarchist blogs, websites, newspapers, and magazines that discuss Occupy, the black bloc, and even the use of the black bloc within Occupy protests.

Despite this major failing, I cannot accuse Mr. Hedges of laziness. He does, after all, dig up an anarchist magazine published in Oregon ten years earlier and he quotes one particular article extensively. The magazine, *Green Anarchy*, is tied in to Hedges' tirade on the basis of the unsupported and inaccurate assertion that anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan, one of the magazine's former editors, is "one of the principal ideologues of the Black Bloc movement." In fact, the black bloc evolved—as a tactic, not a movement—in Europe and came to the United States without any input from Zerzan. Zerzan's only link to the bloc is as one of the few public figures to have endorsed it.

So why does he appear at all in Hedges' article? Presumably to provide the link to *Green Anarchy*. And why *Green Anarchy*? Of all the anarchists and others who have participated in black blocs in the last decades, green anarchists or anarcho-primitivists have only been one small part. Labor union anarchists, anarcho-feminists, social anarchists, indigenous anarchists, Christian anarchists, as well as plain old, unaffiliated street youth, students, immigrants, parents, and others have participated in black blocs.

However, for a mainstream audience susceptible to fear-mongering, the anarcho-primitivists can easily be portrayed as the most extreme, the most irrational, and this kind of crass emotional manipulation is clearly Mr. Hedges' goal.

Despite the tenuous to null connection between *Green Anarchy* and the use of the black bloc within the Occupy movement, he uses a skewed presentation of that magazine to frighten his readers away from a reasoned consideration of the political arguments on which the black bloc is based. For the more intrepid readers, he finishes off the job with inaccurate and unreferenced generalizations such as, “Black Bloc anarchists oppose all organized movements.... They can only be obstructionist.”

Hedges introduces the widely read Zerzan merely as an apologist for the ideas of Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber). Referred to by one NBC reporter as “probably one of the smartest individuals I have encountered” and “very low key, reasoned, and non-threatening,” Zerzan is a far more complex figure, but such details fall outside of Hedges’ plan of attack. His characterization of *Green Anarchy*, and by extension, of all black bloc anarchists, is based on a single article that only appeared in *GA* as a reprint some ten years ago. Neither does Hedges admit that the article itself, “The EZLN are Not Anarchist,” generated considerable controversy and debate among anarchists, nor that *GA* itself published a response by several Zapatistas, which criticized the article for “a colonialist attitude of arrogant ignorance.”

The openness to debate and criticism present in *GA*, is totally absent from Hedges’ latest work of journalism. The manipulation, cherry picking, and dishonesty that underlie his arguments show that for this award-winning journalist, fairness is only a courtesy one extends to those rich or powerful enough to press libel charges. This conception certainly abounds in the pages of the *New York Times*, Hedges’ longtime employer.

The medical language of Hedges’ title, referring to the anarchists as a “cancer,” should immediately ring alarm bells. Portraying one’s opponents as a disease has long been a tactic of the state and the media to justify the repression. This language was used against the Native Americans, against the Jews, against communists, and many others. Recently the police and the right wing used this same language of hygiene to talk about the occupations around the country as health threats so as to justify their eviction and generate disgust and repulsion.

In sum, Chris Hedges deals with the “Black Bloc anarchists” with fear-mongering manipulation and without the slightest glimmer of solidarity. But beneath the black masks, anarchists have been an integral part of the debates, the organizing, the cooking and cleaning in

ular upheaval of 2011 had forced the authorities to legitimize previously unacceptable forms of resistance, with Obama characterizing as “nonviolent” an uprising in which thousands had fought police and burned down police stations. In order to re-legitimize the legal apparatus of the dictatorship, it was necessary to create a new distinction between violent “thugs” and the rest of the population. Yet the substance of this distinction was never spelled out; in practice, “thug” is simply the word for a person targeted by the Emergency Laws. From the perspective of the authorities, ideally *the infliction of violence itself* would suffice to brand its victims as violent—i.e., as legitimate targets.

So when a broad enough part of the population engages in resistance, the authorities have to redefine it as nonviolent, even if it would previously have been considered violent. Otherwise, the dichotomy between violence and legitimacy might erode—and without that dichotomy, it would be much harder to justify the use of force against those who threaten the status quo. By the same token, the more ground we cede in what we permit the authorities to define as violent, the more they will sweep into that category, and the greater risk all of us will face. One consequence of the past several decades of self-described nonviolent civil disobedience is that some people regard merely raising one’s voice as violent; this makes it possible to portray those who take even the most tentative steps to protect themselves against police violence as violent thugs.



In this state of affairs, there is no such thing as *nonviolence*—the closest we can hope to come is to negate the *harm or threat* posed by the proponents of top-down violence. And when so many people are invested in the privileges this violence affords them, it's naïve to think that we could defend ourselves and others among the dispossessed without violating the wishes of at least a few bankers and landlords. So instead of asking whether an action is violent, we might do better to ask simply: *does it counteract power disparities, or reinforce them?*

This is the fundamental anarchist question. We can ask it in every situation; every further question about values, tactics, and strategy proceeds from it. When the question can be framed thus, why would anyone want to drag the debate back to the dichotomy of violence and nonviolence?

The discourse of violence and nonviolence is attractive above all because it offers an easy way to claim the higher moral ground. This makes it seductive both for criticizing the state and for competing against other activists for influence. But in a hierarchical society, gaining the *higher ground* often reinforces hierarchy itself.

Legitimacy is one of the currencies that are unequally distributed in our society, through which its disparities are maintained. Defining people or actions as violent is a way of excluding them from legitimate discourse, of silencing and shutting out. This parallels and reinforces other forms of marginalization: a wealthy white person can act “nonviolently” in ways that would be seen as violent were a poor person of color to do the same thing. In an unequal society, the defining of “violence” is no more neutral than any other tool.

Defining people or actions as violent also has immediate consequences: it justifies the use of force against them. This has been an essential step in practically every campaign targeting communities of color, protest movements, and others on the wrong side of capitalism. If you've attended enough mobilizations, you know that it's often possible to anticipate exactly how much violence the police will use against a demonstration by the way the story is presented on the news the night before. In this regard, pundits and even rival organizers can participate in *policing* alongside the police, determining who is a legitimate target by the way they frame the narrative.

On the one-year anniversary of the Egyptian uprising, the military lifted the Emergency Laws—“except in thug-related cases.” The pop-

dozens of cities. Anarchists also participated in preparing the original call-out for Occupy Wall Street, and they played a key role in organizing and carrying out the historic Oakland general strike and the subsequent West Coast port blockades—probably the strongest actions taken by the Occupy movement to date.

The very fact that Occupy Oakland got out 2,000 people to fight the police for hours in an attempt to occupy a building, at a time when Occupy in other cities is dwindling or dead, contradicts the parallel claims that anarchists are trying to “hijack” Occupy and that their tactics turn people away. On the contrary, anarchists are part and parcel of the Occupy movement and their methods of struggle resonate with many people more than the staid, hand-wringing pacifism and middle-class reformism of careerists like Chris Hedges.

It would be useful to debate the appropriateness of aggressive tactics in demonstrations, and anarchists themselves have often encouraged this debate, but Hedges has passed over the critique and gone straight for the smear. He calls the black bloc anarchists “a gift from heaven for the surveillance and security state,” choosing conspiracy theory paranoia to distract from the public record, filled with cases of government officials and the media alternately serenading and threatening the Occupy movement into an acceptance of nonviolence.

Its proponents in the Occupy movement have generally protected nonviolence from an open debate, instead imposing it through manipulation, fear-mongering, and, when all else fails, turning their opponents over to the police. Hedges himself implies that illegal or aggressive tactics cannot exist in a space where “mothers and fathers [feel] safe,” ignoring the many militant movements built around the needs of mothers and fathers, such as his own favorite example, the Zapatistas. He also dismisses the concept of a diversity of tactics as a “thought-terminating cliché,” demonstrating a willful ignorance of—to name just one example—the many weeks of thoughtful debate that went into the “St. Paul principles” that allowed hundreds of thousands of people with a huge diversity of political practices to come together in 2008 and protest the Republican National Convention.

Predictably, Chris Hedges uses the name of Martin Luther King, Jr., to gain legitimacy for his stance, again contradicting his argument that the “corporate state” wants protestors to fight police and destroy property, given that this same corporate state venerates King (or at least a well managed version of King) while demonizing or silencing

the equally important Malcolm X or Black Panthers. Just as predictably, Chris Hedges does not mention that King vocally sympathized with the urban youths who rioted, youths whose contemporary equivalent Hedges calls “stupid” and a “cancer.” Ironically, Hedges refers to the famous Birmingham campaign attributed with achieving the end of segregation. What Hedges and pacifist ideologues like him fail to mention is that Birmingham was a repeat of King’s Albany campaign, which ended a total failure, all its participants locked up, and no one slightly moved by the supposed dignity of victimhood. The difference? In Birmingham, the local youths got fed up, rioted and kicked police out of large parts of the city for several days. The authorities chose to negotiate with King and replace de jure segregation with de facto segregation in order to avoid losing control entirely.

It’s also hypocritical that on the one hand Chris Hedges utilizes King and parades the dignity of nonviolent suffering while on the other hand he uses the fear of getting injured by police or spending a few nights in jail to mobilize his comfortable, middle class readership to reject the black bloc and the dangers it might bring down on them. “The arrests last weekend in Oakland of more than 400 protesters... are an indication of the scale of escalating repression and a failure to remain a unified, nonviolent opposition.” He goes on to detail the horrible ways police attacked demonstrators, and the conditions in jail.

It’s election year. Those who still have faith in the system, or those whose paychecks are signed by the major unions, the Democratic Party, progressive NGOs, or the left wing of the corporate media, know it’s their job to forcibly convert any popular movement into a pathetic plea to be made at the ballot box. The unmediated, experimental politics of the Occupy movement must give way to symbolic protest and dialogue with the existing “structures of power” whose members must be brought “to our side.” For the Occupy movement to be sanitized and converted into a recruiting tool for the Democratic Party, it will have to be neutralized as a space for real debate, experimentation, and conflict with authority. Its more revolutionary elements will have to be surgically removed. It is an operation the police, the media, and some careerist progressives have been engaged in for months, and Hedges’ contribution is just the latest drop in the bucket.

This form of co-optation and manipulation is nothing new for a movement that cynically harvested a few images from Tahrir Square—an unfinished popular uprising in which hundreds of thousands of peo-

## The Illegitimacy of Violence, the Violence of Legitimacy

CrimethInc.

What is violence? Who gets to define it? Does it have a place in the pursuit of liberation? These age-old questions have returned to the fore during the Occupy movement. But this discussion never takes place on a level playing field; while some delegitimize violence, the language of legitimacy itself paves the way for the authorities to employ it.

Though lines of police on horses, and with dogs, charged the main street outside the police station to push rioters back, there were significant pockets of violence which they could not reach.

—*The New York Times on the UK riots of August 2011*

During the 2001 FTAA summit in Quebec City, one newspaper famously reported that violence erupted when protesters began throwing tear gas canisters back at the lines of riot police. When the authorities are perceived to have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, “violence” is often used to denote *illegitimate use of force*—anything that interrupts or escapes their control. This makes the term something of a floating signifier, since it is also understood to mean “harm or threat that violates consent.”

This is further complicated by the ways our society is based on and permeated by *harm or threat that violates consent*. In this sense, isn’t it violent to live on colonized territory, destroying ecosystems through our daily consumption and benefitting from economic relations that are forced on others at gunpoint? Isn’t it violent for armed guards to keep food and land, once a commons shared by all, from those who need them? Is it more violent to resist the police who evict people from their homes, or to stand aside while people are made homeless? Is it more violent to throw tear gas canisters back at police, or to denounce those who throw them back as “violent,” giving police a free hand to do worse?



of breathtaking hypocrisy, Hedges justifies his bigotry by claiming to be speaking “for” segments of the Oakland activist population who apparently cannot speak for themselves, presumably, in Hedges’ eyes, because of their race:

These anarchists represent no one but themselves. Those in Oakland, although most are white and many are not from the city, arrogantly dismiss Oakland’s African-American leaders, who, along with other local community organizers, should be determining the forms of resistance.

The contradictions of colonialism lie in its attempt to “civilize” its “other”—in this case, the Black Bloc anarchists—and simultaneously to fix them into perpetual otherness. We see this clearly in the apparent acceptable face of Diversity of Tactics in Syria, Greece and Egypt—but it’s abhorrence in North America and Europe.

In the process of decolonization, intellectuals and activists in the immediate political fall out of the deconstruction of empire, must still fight with its continuing legacy. In order to succeed in successfully destroying the dominant definitions of race, class, language and culture, they must offer an alternative to the old colonialist discourse, a new form which establishes itself as a formidable, powerful and distinct identity. This is what Oakland’s Black Bloc, the anarchists and the radicals of the Occupy movement are doing. The fact that they face resistance from the colonizer, represented by the white, educated face of Hedges, is only evidence that they are succeeding in challenging the old hegemonic ways of thinking. In the meantime, they leave Chris Hedges and his ilk struggling with the internal contradictions faced by their role as former colonizer, striving vainly to justify and sustain their old methods of control in the face of tumultuous revolution.

Like Sisyphus, we must imagine them happy.

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ple defended themselves forcefully from the cops, ultimately torching dozens of police stations—to declare a victory for nonviolence.

Around the world, people are fighting for their freedom and resisting the depredations of the rich and powerful. In the United States, there is plenty of cause to join this fight, but as long as people continue enact a fear-driven, Not-In-My-Backyard pacifism, and to pander to the corporate media as though they would ever show us in a positive light, the rich and the powerful will have nothing to worry about.

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indicating how disempowered and delegitimized we are. (Peter Gelderloos 2007)

This emphasis on creating clear, defined dichotomies in order to “delegitimize” thinkers is another tool favored by the colonizer to oppress. The conflation between violence and diversity of tactics is thus another method of controlling and subjugating difference through language. The colonizer creates “the other” in order to define themselves by the perceived deficiency. Hedges’ draws the Black Bloc as the “other,” using colonizing language to create a fantastical, faceless bogeyman against which he can define himself and the “good” members of the Occupy movement, not these fakers, these hooligans, these “Black” bloc anarchists. The binary opposition of black/white bad/good is never explicitly stated, but played upon through Hedges’ powerful, derogatory language. Language is power. In deliberately misappropriating the tactical term “black bloc” as an adjective, and in some cases even a noun, Hedges, perhaps intentionally, creates a mythical, frightening, all-powerful and wholly evil enemy...which does not actually exist:

The Black Bloc movement bears the rigidity and dogmatism of all absolutism sects. Its adherents alone possess the truth. They alone understand. They alone arrogate the right, because they are enlightened and we are not, to dismiss and ignore competing points of view as infantile and irrelevant. They hear only their own voices. They heed only their own thoughts. They believe only their own clichés. And this makes them not only deeply intolerant but stupid.

The struggle for the power to name oneself is enacted within words—to remove that power of naming is a specifically colonial, patriarchal act. No matter to Hedges that the diversity of tactics advocated by the anarchists he quotes and praises in the article on Greece, pushes not towards the replacement of hegemonic nonviolence with an “absolutist sect,” but rather towards a coalition of thought and action which represents the broadest spectrum of thinking and action by which to challenge the structures of oppression. To Hedges, preaching the exclusion of these faceless “black bloc” individuals (which he later clarifies, somewhat disparagingly, given their impressive build up, as “a handful of hooligans”) there is no apparent contradiction. All who approve of violence in Egypt/Greece/Syria by the revolting masses, cannot ever hope to introduce it into their actions in North America. To do so is tantamount to a revolution—against the white, educated face of Hedges and his reformist sect. In a patriarchal twist

the ruling classes by participating in the colonialist discourse in the language of the colonizer. Both Gandhi and MLK were, in a sense, “different” in blood and color, but “western” in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect, and in perpetuating the moral and ethical superiority of the nonviolence both individuals had appropriated from the western discourse itself. Gandhi’s notion of nonviolence was forged as a hybrid between Emerson, Thoreau, Tolstoy and “Ram Rajya.” King’s was formed predominantly by Gandhi’s influence, and a trip to postcolonial India in 1957.

The translation which occurs in Western colonial discourse mythologizes these Middle-Eastern struggles as somehow equal to North American struggles, and yet different to them. Such myths either promote the idea that the Egyptian revolution has been ‘nonviolent’ and “non-violent,” or that the violence on the side of the oppressed in, for example, Tahrir Square, is accepted and acceptable, without acknowledging or explaining the contradiction that it is never acceptable in North America. This promotes and sustains the idea that those in Western countries are, again, the same but different. They are different because they are better. North Americans and Europeans cannot expect revolutionaries in foreign lands to adhere to the same moral and ethical superiority as themselves, the true practitioners of nonviolence and pacifism. The Egyptian revolutionaries protesting in Tahrir Square get a free pass to throw stones because they are “less than” North American protestors, and it sustains North American superiority to characterize our struggle in the West as a struggle which takes place on a higher moral and ethical plain. Despite the fact police brutality is a common and everyday occurrence for many Americans, particularly those living in poverty and homelessness, middle-class educated Occupiers such as Hedges decry the notion of violence as daily routine, because it occurs mainly to uneducated, socially, economically and racially “inferior” sections of the American population. Revolutions on American soil must therefore adhere to a puritanical notion of nonviolence that brings the terminology under the hegemonic control of those privileged few such as Hedges, who manipulate the discourse to give themselves the advantage, and discredit those who are “other:”

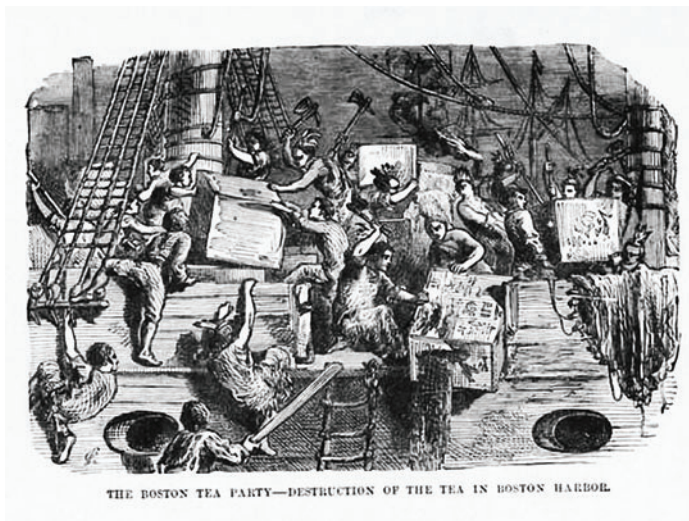
This is exactly what pacifists have done in phrasing the disagreement as violence vs. nonviolence. Critics of nonviolence typically use this dichotomy, with which most of us fundamentally disagree, and push to expand the boundaries of nonviolence so that tactics we support, such as property destruction, may be supported within a nonviolent framework,

## Historicizing “Violence:” Thoughts on the Hedges/Graeber Debate

Peter Wirzbicki

There has been a running debate, started by Chris Hedges, over the proper tactics of street protests and the role of violence in the Occupy movement. Hedges, who was one of the first writers with an audience to support Occupy Wall Street, attacked Black Bloc, which he mistakenly seems to have identified as a cohesive movement, rather than a tactic. Black Bloc occurs when protesters dress the same (normally in black hoodies), move in a pack, and, often, provoke confrontation with the cops by smashing windows, overturning garbage cans, etc. By dressing the same, they make it far more difficult for police to single out individuals. Coming on the heels of the Oakland protests, Hedges called the Black Bloc, a “cancer” on the movement, who provoke unnecessary repression by the state, distract from the message, and practice a sort of negative politics of aggression, in which confrontation and the symbolism of militancy takes the place of organizing and coalition building.

In reply, David Graeber, one of the grandfathers of OWS, defended the Black Bloc. He corrected some of Hedges’ factual inaccuracies, but resorted to a fairly hysterical response to Hedges’ (admittedly unnecessarily provocative) language, accusing Hedges of using a rhetoric that “historically, has been invoked by those encouraging one group of people to physically attack, ethnically cleanse, or exterminate another,” and arguing that Hedges would be read as a call to violence against Black Bloc. (I, at least, sure didn’t read Hedges’ article as a call for genocide). More reasonably he pointed out that the police almost *always* resort to violence and that the media almost *always* blame this violence on protesters, whether or not the Black Bloc is involved. State repression will happen no matter what that kid in the black hoodie does. Finally, he argued that the mythologies that have developed around supposedly non-violent movements have obscured how often they involved violent activities, most often of a far more deadly sort.



Masked political protesters violently destroying property

As a historian of the abolitionist movement, I was struck by how timeless this debate is. Few issues tore the anti-slavery movement apart as much as the question of violence: should fugitives use violence to defend themselves? Should abolitionist victims of mob attacks (like Elijah Lovejoy) violently defend themselves? Should insurrection be encouraged? Some, like William Lloyd Garrison (a pacifist and Christian anarchist), maintained that non-violence was both moral and practical in the long run (by getting the conscience of the North on their side). Others—Frederick Douglass being the most notable, but also Theodore Parker, Charles Lenox Remond, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson—argued that it was “right and wise” to kill someone trying to capture a slave. Like today, activists debated both the morality and the pragmatism of violent activism (different issues that are too often conflated).

One interesting difference, though, was the definition of violence, where the line between violence and nonviolence got drawn. As Graeber suggested at the end of his letter, the violence that Black Bloc protesters have been accused of—breaking windows, spray painting, occasionally throwing rocks—is small beans compared to the violent tactics that have been debated in most political movements. For abolitionists, the question was about the morality of taking up arms against the state, something they did over and over again, killing a number of slaveholders and US Marshals. One group I study, called the Boston Anti-Man Hunting League, planned on kidnapping Southerners who were trying to capture slaves. Kidnapping the

movement, implies hierarchy, which must always be opposed. There can be no restraints on “feral” or “spontaneous” acts of insurrection. Whoever gets hurt gets hurt. Whatever gets destroyed gets destroyed.

There is a word for this—“criminal.”

Greece: the underdogs of Europe, the European “other,” are allowed—even encouraged—to riot. Violence, looting and vandalism are approved when it is to cast out the Colonizer’s enemy, which could, perhaps, result in the strengthening of a new colonialist discourse, the “other’s” continuing subjection to a new colonizer—that which Hedges represents. Fanon notes that “The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives’ heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality.”

We see this at play in Hedges’ dark fear-mongering of the consequences of diversity of tactics in Oakland and the “Black Bloc:”

[T]he Occupy movement, through its steadfast refusal to respond to police provocation, resonated across the country. Losing this moral authority, this ability to show through non-violent protest the corruption and decadence of the corporate state, would be crippling to the movement. It would reduce us to the moral degradation of our oppressors. And that is what our oppressors want.

Yet these are the same tactics—less violent, less widespread—that Hedges applauded in Greece.

Hedges is not alone in reproducing paradoxical colonialist discourse when talking of “other” countries. Frequently, self-proclaimed “nonviolent” participants in the Occupy movement talk in adoring terms of those in Tahrir Square and Syria, invoking the misty-eyed myth that their struggles with state oppression and police brutality in America, are somehow comparable to their comrades’ battles in the Middle East. Again, Said’s *Orientalism* is worth invoking with the central tenet that knowledge is never innocent. Knowledge is always profoundly connected with the operations of power. Holding up Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King as fuzzy and politically correct (because brown) proponents of nonviolence, Western nonviolent pacifists conveniently slide over the white lauding of both Gandhi and MLK precisely because both these figures failed to threaten the hegemony of



quotes indignant former eco-terrorist Derrick Jensen struggling with the radical aversion to resorting to the representatives of militaristic rule, to deal with internal problems: “When I called the police after I received death threats, I became to Black Bloc anarchists ‘a pig lover.’”

This indignity alone, it seems, is enough to fuel Jensen and Hedges’ disturbing anti-anarchist rant.

Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that

it is not the colonialist self or the colonized other, but the disturbing difference in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body.

Fanon’s works examine the psychological affects of colonialism upon people of color in a predominantly white world. His work remains salient, particularly in the context of the Western desire to appropriate, claim and ‘orientalize’ the revolutionary activities in ‘other’ countries, in order to inscribe their name upon the successful results. Egypt under Mubarak is characterized as bad and anti-American, anti-democratic, inhumane.... Egypt revolting in order to embrace democracy is appropriated, through Western discourse, as a prodigal student of Western ideals. This can be seen clearly in Hedges’ “white man’s artifice”—the approbation he gives to his students, the Greeks. “Riot. Shut down the city centers. Toss the bastards out,” Hedges’ exhorts Greece gloatingly. Compare this to his contradictory attitude to the “cancerous” anarchists of the Black Bloc, who, it seems, follow similar tactics to those Hedges admires in Greece—though the Black Bloc of Oakland have not yet come near to the violence and chaos of Greece. Despite this, Oakland’s Black Bloc has provoked the ire of a Master who finds himself discarded and bypassed—overtaken, unwanted, and left to struggle in their wake. Hedges does not recognize the autonomous discourse the Oakland Black Bloc utilize—or perhaps he feels slighted that they abandoned the “accepted” discourse, and appropriated another, before he, the patriarchal father, gave permission. The Oakland Black Bloc is not subject to Hedges, the colonizer, does not, therefore, have “the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body;” and so is rejected and penalized by Hedges:

Random acts of violence, looting and vandalism are justified, in the jargon of the movement, as components of “feral” or “spontaneous insurrection.” These acts, the movement argues, can never be organized. Organization, in the thinking of the

kidnapper, if you will. And when these actors set the terms, non-lethal force was rarely considered “violent.” In 1851, When a mob of black Bostonians pushed their way into a court room, grabbed a slave, “kicked, cuffed and knocked about” some guards, and ran off, Garrison applauded the act. If he thought pushing their way into a court room and shoving down police officers crossed the line, he didn’t mention it. The point was, when abolitionists discussed what tactics were violent, they meant things far more radical and dangerous than anything that the Black Bloc thinks about.

Obviously the stakes were much higher in the fight against slavery than they are today in the Occupy movement. But violence of some form has dotted American social movements. Let’s not run away from this: the Left has often used violent tactics, as one, among many strategies. Unions waged pitched battles against state militias and violently kept scabs away from workplaces, black homeowners defended their right to integrate neighborhoods with the force of arms, and even the Stonewall Riot was, well, a riot, complete with firebombs, thrown bottles, and bloodied cops. What’s remarkable, in fact, is how little violence, all in all, the OWS movement has engendered. No talk of running to the barricades, no calls for “the deliberate increase in the chances of death,” or the “conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder,” no naming of “defense ministers” for the movement, or sloganeering about the “birth-pangs” of the new society.

The best defense of Graeber’s point, then, is that by defining “violence,” in such a narrow way (one that, without questioning it, includes property destruction as well as self-defense in the same category as aggressive violence against human beings), Hedges sets up an unrealistic standard, that few if any social movements could meet. If you get 100,000 angry people in the street, its hard to imagine that some won’t throw a rock or fight back when cops try to kick the shit out of them. This is especially true as cities impose greater and greater restrictions on the ability of protesters to meet, and as police resort to greater and greater acts of repression and violence. So hewing too closely to some mythologized vision of nonviolence, and working to exclude those violate the terms, means accepting a paralyzing and self-limiting definition of what are acceptable tactics.

The whole debate illustrates well the elasticity of the term violence, and the historically specific ways that it gets defined. At an earlier time, you were one of the “good” ones, if you eschewed armed struggle, and just limited yourself to the occasional excess in the street protest. Today, according to the administration of Berkeley, linking arms to



resist police invasion is an act of violence. The Left should, rather than accept the state's definition of what is nonviolent (and therefore what is "good" activism) fight back at an ideological level against definitions that only restrict our behavior.

At the same time, it's hard to take Graeber's wounded outrage totally seriously. Does he really not understand why nonviolent protesters are angry when a tiny minority hijacks their events? Does he really not see how a small group trying to provoke the cops endangers everyone? I'm not super offended by Black Bloc tactics, but if I were the type to engage in them, I sure wouldn't be shocked when other people disapproved. I also have no patience for the ultra-leftists who openly detest unions, community groups, and the Democratic Party as a bunch of pathetic bureaucratic sell-outs, but then clutch their pearls in shock when anyone dares to attack *their* preferred group or tactic.

As Bhaska Srunkara points out, tactics like the Black Bloc are unlikely to lead to the type of democratic dialogue that will inspire more people to join a movement. It's hard to see how a smashed window will convince anyone to join your movement, but it's easy to see how it will keep them out. "Masks, after all, aren't good for talking to people." And rarely do you see the "fuck-shit-up" crowd coming to the boring planning meetings or going out flyering with you.

In my mind, the proper response is for all sides to dial down the outrage. This question is old and probably never ending. I have absolutely no interest in throwing a brick or whatnot, but I think history teaches us that at a low level, at least, such things are likely to be part of any significant social movement. As long as serious acts of violence against people (as opposed to against property) don't erupt, I'm willing to live and let live, while remembering that the real action should be in dialogue, organizing, and recruitment, not whatever happens to the Starbucks window.

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## Colonizer: A Post-Colonial Reading of Chris Hedges

OLA Anti-Social Media

The sudden *volte-face* of famed Liberal destroyer Chris Hedges in his recent demonization of the Black Bloc, sinisterly entitled "The Cancer of Occupy," is a wonderful introduction for North American activists to the field of Postcolonial Theory. Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism* examines how Western study of "The Orient" contributes to the functioning of colonial power. Representations of "The Orient" in Western texts purporting to offer knowledge and insight into 'other' countries, actually perpetuate the dichotomy between the West and 'Others'—in so doing, reaffirming the colonial relationship, even long after postcolonialism has apparently been established following the decolonizing process. The role of former colonizer is adopted in the discourse by the white, educated Chris Hedges, who writes glowingly of Greece's response to their economic crisis in an article from May 2010:

Call a general strike. Riot. Shut down the city centers. Toss the bastards out. Do not be afraid of the language of class warfare—the rich versus the poor, the oligarchs versus the citizens, the capitalists versus the proletariat. The Greeks, unlike most of us, get it.

The Greeks, here, take the liminal role of "other." In Hedges' terms, they mimic his intellectual, activist ideals, without ever becoming equal to him. They are the student: he the master, echoing Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minutes on Indian Education," printed in 1835, which set out an agenda to train "natives" who were "Indian in blood and colour" to become "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect." These mimics would constitute a class who could protect British interests and help them in exerting rule over the empire. They would emulate, but never initiate or fully embody the ruling class values, in so doing ensuring their subjection and reliance on the colonizer. Hedges exhorts his ideal Occupiers to do the same, to denounce Diversity of Tactics, and to hurl their anarchist and Black Bloc comrades beneath the bus, by handing them over to the police. Hedges